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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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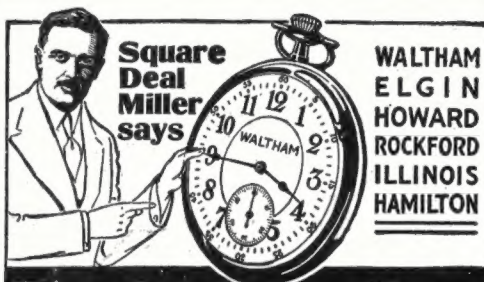


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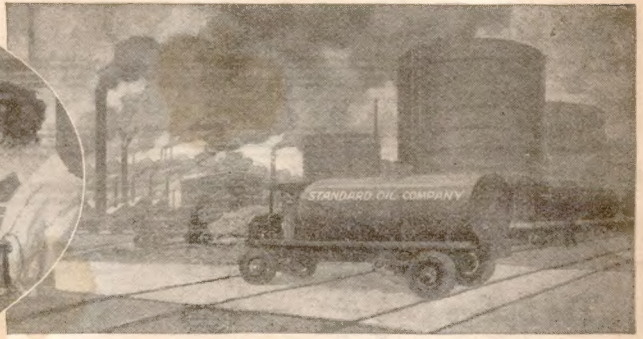
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXXIII

NUMBER 2



SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 1918



The Strange Case of Cavendish^{*} by Randall Parrish

Author of "The Devil's Own," "When Wilderness Was King," "My Lady of the North," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE REACHING OF A DECISION.

FOR the second time that night Frederick Cavendish, sitting at a small table in a busy café where the night life of the city streamed continually in and out, regarded the telegram spread out upon the white napery. It read:

Bear Creek, Colorado,
4/2/15.

FREDERICK CAVENDISH,
College Club,
New York City.
Found big lead; lost it again. Need you badly.
WESTCOTT.

For the second time that night too, a picture rose before him, a picture of great plains, towering mountains, and open spaces that spoke the freedom and health of outdoor living. He had known that life once before, when he and Jim Westcott had prospected and hit the trail together, and its appeal to him now after three years of shallow sightseeing in the city was deeper than ever.

"Good old Jim," he murmured, "struck

pay-dirt at last only to lose it and he needs me. By George, I think I'll go."

And why should he not? Only twenty-nine, he could still afford to spend a few years in search of living. His fortune left him at the death of his father was safely invested, and he had no deep friends in the city and no relatives, except a cousin, John Cavendish, for whom he held no love, and little regard.

He had almost determined upon going to Bear Creek to meet Westcott and was calling for his check when his attention was arrested by a noisy party of four that boisterously took seats at a near-by table. Cavendish recognized the two women as members of the chorus of the prevailing Revue, one of them Celeste La Rue, an aggressive blonde with thin lips and a metallic voice, whose name was synonymous with midnight escapades and flowing wine. His contemptuous smile at the sight of them deepened into a disgusted sneer when he saw that one of the men was John Cavendish, his cousin.

The two men's eyes met, and the younger, a slight, mild-eyed youth with a

^{*} Copyright, 1918, by Randall Parrish.

listless jaw; excused himself and presented himself at the elder's table.

"Won't you join us?" he said nervously.

Frederick Cavendish's trim, bearded jaw tightened and he shook his head. "They are not my people," he said shortly, then retreating, begged, "John, when are you going to cut that sort out?"

"You make me weary!" the boy snapped. "It's easy enough for you to talk when you've got all the money—that gives you an excuse to read me moral homilies every time I ask you for a dollar, but Miss La Rue is as good as any of your friends any day."

The other controlled himself. "What is it you want?" he demanded directly: "Money? If so, how much?"

"A hundred will do," the younger man said eagerly. "I lost a little on cards lately, and have to borrow. To-night I met the girl—"

Frederick Cavendish silenced him and tendered him the bills. "Now," he said gravely, "this is the last, unless—unless you cut out such people as Celeste La Rue and others that you train with. I'm tired of paying bills for your inane extravagances and parties. I can curtail your income and what's more, I will unless you change."

"Cut me off?" The younger Cavendish's voice took on an incredulous note.

The other nodded. "Just that," he said. "You've reached the limit."

For a moment the dissipated youth surveyed his cousin, then an angry flush mounted into his pasty face.

"You—you—" he stuttered, "—you go to hell."

Without another word the elderly Cavendish summoned the waiter, paid the bill, and walked toward the door. John stared after him, a smile of derision on his face. He had heard Cavendish threaten before.

"Your cousin seemed peeved," suggested Miss La Rue.

"It's his nature," explained John. "Got sore because I asked him for a mere hundred and threatened to cut off my income unless I quit you two."

"You told him where to go," Miss La

Rue said, laughing. "I heard you, but I don't suppose he'll go—he doesn't look like that kind."

"Anyhow, I told him," laughed John; then producing a large bill, cried: "Drink up, people, they're on me—and goody-goody cousin Fred."

When Frederick Cavendish reached the street and the fresh night air raced through his lungs he came to a sudden realization and then a resolution. The realization was that since further pleading would avail nothing with John Cavendish, he needed a lesson. The resolution was to give it to him. Both strengthened his previous half-hearted desire to meet Westcott, into determination.

He turned the matter over in his mind as he walked along until reflection was ended by the doors of the College Club which appeared abruptly and took him in their swinging circle. He went immediately to the writing-room, laid aside his things and sat down. The first thing to do, he decided, was to obtain an attorney and consult him regarding the proper steps. For no other reason than that they had met occasionally in the corridor he thought of Patrick Enright, a heavy-set man with a loud voice and given to wearing expensive clothes.

Calling a page boy, he asked that Enright be located if possible. During the ensuing wait he outlined on a scrap of paper what he proposed doing. Fifteen minutes passed before Enright, suave and apparently young except for growing baldness, appeared.

"I take it you are Mr. Cavendish," he said advancing, "and that you are in immediate need of an attorney's counsel."

Cavendish nodded, shook hands, and motioned him into a chair. "I have been called suddenly out of town, Mr. Enright," he explained, "and for certain reasons which need not be disclosed I deem it necessary to execute a will. I am the only son of the late William Huntington Cavendish; also his sole heir, and in the event of my death without a will, the property would descend to my only known relative, a cousin."

"His name?" Mr. Enright asked.

"John Cavendish."

The lawyer nodded. Of young Cavendish he evidently knew.

"Because of his dissolute habits I have decided to dispose of a large portion of my estate elsewhere in case of my early death. I have here a rough draft of what I want done." He showed the paper. "All that I require is that it be transposed into legal form."

Enright took the paper and read it carefully. The bulk of the \$1,000,000 Cavendish estate was willed to charitable organizations, and a small allowance, a mere pittance, was provided for John Cavendish. After a few inquiries the attorney said sharply: "You want this transcribed immediately?"

Cavendish nodded.

"Since it can be made brief I may possibly be able to do it on the girl's machine in the office. You do not mind waiting a moment?"

Cavendish shook his head, and rising, the attorney disappeared in the direction of the office. Cavendish heaved a sigh of relief; now he was free, absolutely free, to do as he chose. His disappearance would mean nothing to his small circle of casual friends, and when he was settled elsewhere he could notify the only two men who were concerned with his whereabouts—his valet, Valois, and the agent handling the estate. He thought of beginning a letter to John, but hesitated, and when Enright returned he found him with pen in hand.

"A trifling task," the attorney smiled easily. "All ready for your signature, too. You sign there, the second line. But wait—we must have witnesses."

Simms, the butler, and the doorman were called in and wrote their names to the document and then withdrew, after which Enright began folding it carefully.

"I presume you leave this in my care?" he asked shortly.

Cavendish shook his head: "I think not. I prefer holding it myself in case it is needed suddenly. I shall keep my rooms, and my man Valois will remain there indefinitely. Now as to your charges."

A nominal sum was named and paid,

after which Cavendish rose, picked up his hat and stick and turned to Enright.

"You have obliged me greatly," he smiled, "and, of course, the transaction will be considered as strictly confidential." And then seeing Enright's nod bade him a courteous "Good night."

The attorney watched him disappear. Suddenly he struck the table with one hand.

"By God!" he muttered, "I'll have to see this thing a little further."

Wheeling suddenly, he walked to a telephone booth, called a number and waited impatiently several moments before he said in tense subdued tones: "Is this Carlton's Café? Give me Jackson, the head-waiter. Jackson, is Mr. Cavendish—John Cavendish—there? Good! Call him to the phone will you, Jackson? It's important."

CHAPTER II.

THE BODY ON THE FLOOR.

THE early light of dawn stealing in faintly through the spider-web of the fire-escape ladder, found a partially open window on the third floor of the Waldron apartments, and began slowly to brighten the walls of the room within. There were no curtains on this window as upon the others, and the growing radiance streamed in revealing the whole interior. It was a large apartment, furnished soberly and in excellent taste as either lounging-room or library, the carpet a dark green, the walls delicately tinted, bearing a few rare prints rather somberly framed, and containing a few upholstered chairs; a massive sofa, and a library table bearing upon it a stack of magazines.

Its tenant evidently was of artistic leanings for about the room were several large bronze candle-sticks filled with partially burned tapers. A low bookcase extended along two sides of the room, each shelf filled, and at the end of the cases a heavy imported drapery drawn slightly aside revealed the entrance to a sleeping apartment, the bed's snowy covering unruffled. Wealth, taste and comfort were everywhere manifest.

Yet, as the light lengthened, the surroundings evidenced disorder. One chair lay overturned, a porcelain vase had fallen from off the table-top to the floor and scattered into fragments. A few magazines had fallen also, and there were miscellaneous papers scattered about the carpet, one or two of them torn as though jerked open by an impatient hand. Still others lying near the table disclosed corners charred by fire, and as an eddy of wind whisked through the window and along the floor it tumbled brown ashes along with it, at the same time diluting the faint odor of smoke that clung to the room. Back of the table a small safe embedded in the wall stood with its door wide open, its inner drawer splintered as with a knife blade and hanging half out, and below it a riffle of papers, many of them apparently legal documents.

But the one object across which the golden beams of light fell as though in soft caress was the motionless figure of a man lying upon his back beside the table near the drapeless window. Across his face and shoulders were the charred remains of what undoubtedly had been curtains on that window. A three-socketed candlestick filled with partially burned candles which doubtless had been knocked from the table was mute evidence of how the tiny flame had started upon its short march. As to the man's injuries, a blow from behind had evidently crushed his skull and, though the face was seared and burned, though the curtain's partial ashes covered more than a half of it, though the eyelashes above the sightless eyes were singed and the trim beard burned to black stubs, the face gave mute evidence of being that of Frederick Cavendish.

In this grim scene a tiny clock on the mantle began pealing the hour of eight. As though this were a signal for entrance, the door at the end of the bookcase opened noiselessly and a man, smooth faced, his hair brushed low across his forehead, stepped quietly in. As his eyes surveyed the gruesome object by the table, they dilated with horror; then his whole body stiffened and he fled back into the hall, crashing the door behind him.

Ten minutes later he returned, not alone,

however. This time his companion was John Cavendish but partially dressed, his features white and haggard.

With nervous hands he pushed open the door. At the sight of the body he trembled a moment, then, mastering himself, strode over and touched the dead face, the other meanwhile edging into the room.

"Dead, sir, really *dead*?" the late comer asked.

Cavendish nodded: "For several hours," he answered in an unnatural voice. "He must have been struck from behind. Robbery evidently was the object — cold-blooded robbery."

"The window is open, sir, and last night at twenty minutes after twelve I locked it. Mr. Cavendish came in at twelve and, locking the window was the last thing I did before he told me I could go."

"He left no word for a morning call?"

Valois shook his head: "I always bring his breakfast at eight," he explained.

"Did he say anything about suddenly leaving the city for a trip West? I heard such a rumor."

"No, sir. He was still up when I left and had taken some papers from his pocket. When last I saw him he was looking at them. He seemed irritated."

There was a moment's silence, during which the flush returned to Cavendish's cheeks, but his hands still trembled.

"You heard nothing during the night?" he demanded.

"Nothing, sir. I swear I knew nothing until I opened the door and saw the body a few moments ago."

"You'd better stick to your story, Valois," the other said sternly. "The police will be here shortly. I'm going to call them, now."

He was calm, efficient, self-contained now as he got Central Station upon the wire and began talking.

"Hello, lieutenant? Yes. This is John Cavendish of the Waldron apartments speaking. My cousin, Frederick Cavendish, has been found dead in his room and his safe rifled. Nothing has been disturbed. Yes, at the Waldron, Fifty-Seventh Street. Please hurry."

Perhaps half an hour later the police

came—two bull-necked plain-clothes men and a flannel-mouthed "cop."

With them came three reporters, one of them a woman. She was a young woman, plainly dressed and, though she could not be called beautiful, there was a certain patrician prettiness in her small, oval, womanly face with its gray kind eyes, its aquiline nose, its firm lips and determined jaw, a certain charm in the manner in which her chestnut hair escaped occasionally from under her trim hat. Young, aggressive, keen of mind and tireless, Stella Donovan was one of the few good woman reporters of the city and the only one the *Star* kept upon its pinched pay-roll. They did so because she could cover a man-size job and get a feminine touch into her story after she did it. And, though her customary assignments were "sob" stories, divorces, society events and the tracking down of succulent bits of general scandal, she nevertheless enjoyed being upon the scene of the murder even though she was not assigned to it. This casual duty was for Willis, the *Star's* "police" man, who had dragged her along with him for momentary company over her protest that she must get a "yarn" concerning juvenile prisoners for the Sunday edition.

"Now, we'll put 'em on the rack." Willis smiled as he left her side and joined the detectives.

A flood of questions from the officers, interspersed frequently with a number from Willis, and occasionally one from the youthful *Chronicle* man, came down upon Valois and John Cavendish, while Miss Donovan, silent and watchful, stood back, frequently letting her eyes admire the tasteful prints upon the walls and the rich hangings in the room of death.

Valois repeated his experience, which was corroborated in part by the testimony of John Cavendish's valet whom he had met and talked with in the hall. The valet also testified that his employer, John Cavendish, had come home not later than twelve o'clock and immediately retired. Then John Cavendish established the fact that ten minutes before arriving home he had dropped Celeste La Rue at her apartment. There was no flaw in any of the

stories to which the inquisitors could attach suspicion. One thing alone seemed to irritate Willis.

"Are you sure," he said to Cavendish, "that the dead man is your cousin? The face and chest are pretty badly burned you know, and I thought perhaps—"

A laugh from the detectives silenced him while Cavendish ended any fleeting doubts with a contemptuous gaze.

"You can't fool a man on his own cousin, youngster," he said flatly. "The idea is absurd."

The crime unquestionably was an outside job; the window opening on the fire-escape had been jimmied, the marks left, being clearly visible. Apparently Frederick Cavendish had previously opened the safe door—since it presented no evidence of being tampered with—and was examining certain papers on the table, when the intruder had stolen up from behind and dealt him a heavy blow probably, from the nature of the wound, using a piece of lead pipe. Perhaps in falling Cavendish's arm had caught in the curtains, pulling them from the supporting rod and dragging them across the table, thus sweeping the candlestick with its lighted tapers down to the floor with it. There the extinguished wicks had ignited the draperies, which had fallen across the stricken man's face and body. The clothes, torso, and legs, had been charred beyond recognition but the face, by some peculiar whim of fate, had been partly preserved.

The marauder, aware that the flames would obliterate a portion, if not all of the evidence against him, had rifled the safe in which, John testified, his cousin always kept considerable money. Scattering broadcast valueless papers, he had safely made his escape through the window, leaving his victim's face to the licking flames. Footprints below the window at the base of the fire-escape indicated that the fugitive had returned that way. This was the sum of the evidence, circumstantial and true, that was advanced. Satisfied that nothing else was to be learned, the officers, detectives, Willis, and Miss Donovan and the pale *Chronicle* youth withdrew, leaving the officer on guard.

The same day, young John, eager to be away from the scene, moved his belongings to the Fairmount Hotel and, since no will was found in the dead man's papers, the entire estate came to him, as next of kin. A day or two later the body was interred in the family lot beside the father's grave, and the night of the funeral young John Cavendish dined at an out-of-the-way road-house with a blonde with a hard metallic voice. Her name was Miss Celeste La Rue.

And the day following he discharged François Valois without apparent cause, in a sudden burst of temper. So, seemingly, the curtain fell on the last act of the play.

CHAPTER III.

MR. ENRIGHT DECLARES HIMSELF.

ONE month after the Cavendish murder and two days after he had despatched a casual, courteous note to John Cavendish requesting that he call, Mr. Patrick Enright, of Enright and Dougherty, sat in his private office on the top floor of the Collander Building in Cortlandt Street waiting for the youth's appearance. Since young Cavendish had consulted him before in minor matters, Mr. Enright had expected that he would call voluntarily soon after the murder, but in this he was disappointed. Realizing that Broadway was very dear to the young man, Enright had made allowances, until, weary of waiting, he decided to get into the game himself and to this end had despatched the note, to which Cavendish had replied both by telephone and note.

"He ought to be here now," murmured Mr. Enright sweetly, looking at his watch, and soon the expected visitor was ushered in. Arising to his feet the attorney extended a moist, pudgy hand.

"Quite prompt, John," he greeted. "Take the chair there—and pardon me a moment."

As the youth complied Enright opened the door, glanced into the outer room, and gave orders not to be disturbed for the next half-hour. Then, drawing in his head, closed the door and turned the key.

"John," he resumed smoothly, "I have been somewhat surprised that you failed to consult me earlier regarding the will of your late cousin Frederick."

"His—his will!" John leaned forward amazed, as he stared into the other's expressionless face. "Did—did he leave one?"

"Oh! that's it," the attorney chuckled. "You didn't know about it, did you? How odd. I thought I informed you of the fact over the phone the same night Frederick died."

"You told me he had called upon you to prepare a will—but there was none found in his papers."

"So I inferred from the newspaper accounts," Enright chuckled dryly, his eyes narrowing, "as well as the information that you had applied for letters of administration. In view of that, I thought a little chat advisable—yes, quite advisable, since on the night of his death I *did* draw up his will. Incidentally, I am the only one living aware that such a will was drawn. You see my position?"

Young Cavendish didn't; this was all strange, confusing.

"The will," resumed Mr. Enright, "was drawn in proper form and duly witnessed."

"There can't be such a will. None was found. You phoned me shortly before midnight, and twenty minutes later Frederick was in his apartments. He had no time to deposit it elsewhere. There is no such will."

Enright smiled, not pleasantly by any means.

"Possibly not," he said with quiet sinister gravity. "It was probably destroyed and it was to gain possession of that will that Frederick Cavendish was killed."

John leaped to his feet, his face bloodless: "My God!" he muttered aghast, "do you mean to say—"

"Sit down, John; this is no cause for quarrel. Now listen. I am not accusing you of crime; not intentional crime, at least. There is no reason why you should not naturally have desired to gain possession of the will. If an accident happened, that was your misfortune. I merely mention these things because I am your friend.

Such friendship leads me first to inform you what had happened over the phone. I realized that Frederick's hasty determination to devise his property elsewhere was the result of a quarrel. I believed it my duty to give you opportunity to patch that quarrel up with the least possible delay. Perhaps this was not entirely professional on my part, but the claims of friendship are paramount to mere professional ethics."

He sighed, clasping and unclasping his hands, yet with eyes steadily fixed upon Cavendish, who had sunk back into his chair.

"Now consider the situation, my dear fellow. I have, it is true, performed an unprofessional act which, if known, would expose me to severe criticism. There is, however, no taint of criminal intent about my conduct and, no doubt, my course would be fully vindicated, were I now to go directly before the court and testify to the existence of a will."

"But that could not be proved. You have already stated that Frederick took the will with him; it has never been found."

"Quite true—or rather, it may have been found, and destroyed. It chances, however, that I took the precaution to make a carbon copy."

"Unsigned?"

"Yes, but along with this unsigned copy, I also retain the original memoranda furnished me in Frederick Cavendish's own handwriting. I believe, from a legal standpoint, by the aid of my evidence, the court would be very apt to hold such a will proved."

He leaned suddenly forward, facing the shrinking Cavendish and bringing his hand down hard upon the desk.

"Do you perceive now what this will means? Do you realize where such testimony would place you? Under the law, providing he died without a will, you were the sole heir to the property of Frederick Cavendish. It was widely known you were not on friendly terms. The evening of his death you quarreled openly in a public restaurant. Later, in a spirit of friendship, I called you up and said he had made a will practically disinheriting you. Between that time and the next morning he is mur-

dered in his own apartments, his safe rifled, and yet, the only paper missing is this will, to the existence of which I can testify. If suspicion is once cast upon you, how can you clear yourself? Can you prove that you were in your own apartments, asleep in your own bed from one o'clock until eight? Answer that."

Cavendish tried, but although his lips moved, they gave utterance to no sound. He could but stare into those eyes confronting him. Enright scarcely gave him opportunity.

"So, the words won't come. I thought not. Now listen. I am not that kind of a man and I have kept still. No living person—not even my partner—has been informed of what has occurred. The witnesses, I am sure, do not know the nature of the paper they signed. I am a lawyer; I realize fully the relations I hold to my client, but in this particular case I contend that my duty as a man is of more importance than any professional ethics. Frederick Cavendish had this will executed in a moment of anger and devised his estate to a number of charities. I personally believe he was not in normal mind and that the will did not really reflect his purpose. He had no thought of immediate death, but merely desired to teach you a lesson. He proposed to disappear—or at least, that is my theory—in order that he might test you on a slender income. I am able to look upon the whole matter from this standpoint, and base my conduct accordingly. No doubt this will enable us to arrive at a perfectly satisfactory understanding."

The lawyer's voice had fallen, all the threat gone, and the younger man straightened in his chair.

"You mean you will maintain silence as to the will?"

"Absolutely; as a client your interests will always be my first concern."

"Of course, I shall expect to represent you in a legal capacity in settling up the estate, and consequently feel it only just that the compensation for such services shall be mutually agreed upon."

"In this case there are many interests to guard. Knowing, as I do, all the es-

sential facts, I am naturally better prepared to conserve your interests than any stranger. I hope you appreciate this."

"And your fee?"

"Reasonable, very reasonable, when you consider the service I am doing you, and the fact that my professional reputation might so easily be involved and the sums to be distributed, which amount to more than a million dollars. My silence, my permitting the estate to go to settlement, and my legal services combined, ought to be held as rather valuable—at, let us say, a hundred thousand. Yes, a hundred thousand; I hardly think that is unfair."

Cavendish leaped to his feet, his hand gripping his cane.

"You damned black—"

"Wait!" and Enright arose also. "Not so loud, please; your voice might be heard in the outer office. Besides it might be well for you to be careful of your language. I said my services would cost you a hundred thousand dollars. Take the proposition or leave it, Mr. John Cavendish. Perhaps, with a moment's thought, the sum asked may not seem excessive."

"But—but," the other stammered, all courage leaving him, "I haven't the money."

"Of course not," the threat on Enright's face changing to a smile. "But the prospects that you will have are unusually good. I am quite willing to speculate on your fortunes. A memoranda for legal services due one year from date—such as I have already drawn up—and bearing your signature, will be quite satisfactory. Glance over the items please; yes, sit here at the table. Now, if you will sign that there will be no further cause for you to feel any uneasiness—this line, please."

Cavendish grasped the penholder in his fingers, and signed. It was the act of a man dazed, half stupefied, unable to control his actions. With trembling hand, and white face, he sat staring at the paper, scarcely comprehending its real meaning. In a way it was a confession of guilt, an acknowledgement of his fear of exposure, yet he felt utterly incapable of resistance. Enright unlocked the door, and projected his head outside, comprehending clearly

that the proper time to strike was while the iron was hot.

Calling Miss Healey, one of his stenographers, he made her an official witness to the document and the signature of John Cavendish.

Not until ten minutes later when he was on the street did it occur to John Cavendish that the carbon copy of the will, together with the rough notes in his cousin's handwriting, still remained in Enright's possession. Vainly he tried to force himself to return and demand them, but his nerve failed, and he shuffled away hopelessly in the hurrying crowds.

CHAPTER IV.

A BREATH OF SUSPICION.

AS François Valois trudged along the night streets toward his rooming house his heart was plunged in sorrow and suspicion. To be discharged from a comfortable position for no apparent reason when one contemplated no sweet alliance was bad enough, but to be discharged when one planned marriage to so charming a creature as Josette La Baum was nothing short of a blow. Josette herself had admitted that and promptly turned François's hazards as to young Cavendish's motives into smoldering suspicion, which he dared not voice. Now, as he paused before a delicatessen window realizing that unless he soon obtained another position its dainties would be denied him, these same suspicions assailed him again.

Disheartened, he turned from the pane and was about to move away, when he came face to face with a trim young woman in a smart blue serge. "Oh, hello!" she cried pleasantly bringing up short. Then seeing the puzzled look upon the valet's face, she said: "Don't you remember me? I'm Miss Donovan of the *Star*. I came up to the apartments the morning of the Cavendish murder with one of the boys."

Valois smiled warmly; men usually did for Miss Donovan. "I remember," he said dolorously.

The girl sensed some underlying sorrow.

in his voice and with professional skill learned the cause within a minute. Then, because she believed that there might be more to be told, and because she was big-hearted and interested in every one's troubles, she urged him to accompany her to a near-by restaurant and pour out his heart while she supped. Lonely and disheartened, Valois accepted gladly and within half an hour they were seated at a tiny table in an Italian café.

"About your discharge?" she queried after a time.

"I was not even asked to accompany Mr. Frederick's body," he burst out, "even though I had been with him a year. So I stayed in the apartment to straighten things, expecting to be retained in John Cavendish's service. I even did the work in his apartments, but when he returned and saw me there he seemed to lose his temper, wanted to know why I was hanging around, and ordered me out of the place."

"The ingrate!" exclaimed the girl, laying a warm, consoling hand on the other's arm. "You're sure he wasn't drinking?"

"I don't think so, miss. Just the sight of me seemed to drive him mad. Flung money at me, he did, told me to get out, that he never wanted to see me again. Since then I have tried for three weeks to find work, but it has been useless."

While she gave him a word of sympathy, Miss Donovan was busily thinking. She remembered Willis's remark in the apartments, "Are you sure of the dead man's identity? His face is badly mutilated, you know"; and her alert mind sensed a possibility of a newspaper story back of young Cavendish's unwarranted and strange act. How far could she question the man before her? That she had established herself in his good grace she was sure, and to be direct with him she decided would be the best course to adopt.

"Mr. Valois," she said kindly, "would you mind if I asked you a question or two more?"

"No," the man returned.

"All right. First, what sort of a man was your master?"

Valois answered almost with reverence:

"A nice, quiet gentleman. A man that

liked outdoors and outdoor sports. He almost never drank, and then only with quiet men like himself that he met at various clubs. Best of all, he liked to spend his evenings at home reading."

"Not much like his cousin John," she ventured with narrowing eyes.

"No, ma'am, God be praised! There's a young fool for you, miss, crazy for the women and his drinking. Brought up to spend money, but not to earn any."

"I understand that he was dependent upon Frederick Cavendish."

"He was, miss," Valois said disgustedly, "for every cent. He could never get enough of it, either, although Mr. Frederick gave him a liberal allowance."

"Did they ever quarrel?"

"I never heard them. But I do know there was no love lost between them, and I know that young John was always broke."

"Girls cost lots on Broadway," Miss Donovan suggested, "and they keep men up late, too."

Valois laughed lightly. "John only came home to sleep occasionally," he said; "and as for the woman—one of them called on him the day after Mr. Frederick was killed. I was in the hall, and saw her go straight to his door—like she had been there before. A swell dresser, miss, if I ever saw one. One of those tall blondes with a reddish tinge in her hair. He likes that kind."

Miss Donovan started imperceptibly. This was interesting; a woman in John Cavendish's apartment the day after his cousin's murder! But who was she? There were a million carrot-blondes in Manhattan. Still, the woman must have had some distinguishing mark; her hat, perhaps, or her jewels.

"Did the woman wear any diamonds?" she asked.

"No diamonds," Valois returned; "a ruby, though. A ruby set in a big platinum ring. I saw her hand upon the knob."

Miss Donovan's blood raced fast. She knew that woman. It was Celeste La Rue! She remembered her because of a press-agent story that had once been written about the ring, and from what Miss Donovan knew of Miss La Rue, she did not ordinarily seek men; therefore there must

have been a grave reason for her presence in John Cavendish's apartments immediately after she learned of Frederick's death.

Had his untimely end disarranged some plan of these two? What was the reason she had come in person instead of telephoning? Had her mysterious visit anything to do with the death of the elder Cavendish?

A thousand speculations entered Miss Donovan's mind.

"How long was she in the apartment?" she demanded sharply.

"Fifteen or twenty minutes, miss—until after the hallman came back. I had to help lay out the body, and could not remain there any longer."

"Have you told any one else what you have told me?"

"Only Josette. She's my *fiancée*. Miss La Baum is her last name."

"You told her nothing further that did not come out at the inquest?"

Valois hesitated.

"Maybe I did, miss," he admitted nervously. "She questioned me about losing my job, and her questions brought things into my mind that I might never have thought of otherwise. And at last I came to believe that it wasn't Mr. Frederick who was dead at all."

The valet's last remark was crashing in its effect.

Miss Donovan's eyes dilated with eagerness and amazement.

"Not Frederick Cavendish! Mr. Valois, tell me—why?"

The other's voice fell to a whisper.

"Frederick Cavendish, miss," he said hollowly, "had a scar on his chest—from football, he once told me—and the man we laid out, well, of course his body was a bit burned, but he appeared to have no scar at all!"

"You know that?" demanded the girl, frightened by the import of the revelation.

"Yes, miss. The assistant in the undertaking rooms said so, too. Doubting my own mind, I asked him. The man we laid out had no scar on his chest."

Miss Donovan sprang suddenly to her feet.

"Mr. Valois," she said breathlessly,

"you come and tell that story to my city editor, and he'll see that you get a job—and a real one. You and I have started something, Mr. Valois."

And, tossing money to cover the bill on the table, she took Valois's arm, and with him in tow hurried through the restaurant to the city streets on one of which was the *Star* office, where Farriss, the city editor, daily damned the doings of the world.

The night when Farriss had heard the evidence his metallic eyes snapped with an unusual light. Farriss, for once, was enthusiastic.

"A great lead! By God, it is! Now to prove it, Stella"—Farriss always resorted to first names—"you drop everything else and go to this, learn what you can, spend money if you have to. I'll drag Willis off police, and you work with him. And damn me, if you two spend money, you've got to work! I'll give you a week—when you've got something, come back!"

CHAPTER V.

ON TRACK OF A CRIME.

IN the city room of the *Star*, Farriss, the city editor, sat back in his swivel chair smoking a farewell pipe preparatory to going home. The final edition had been put to bed, the wires were quiet, and as he sat there Farriss was thinking of plunging "muskie" in Maine streams. His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a clatter of footsteps, and, slapping his feet to the floor, he turned to confront Willis and Miss Donovan.

"Great God!" he started, at their appearance at so late an hour.

Miss Donovan smiled at him. "No; great luck!"

"Better than that, Mr. Farriss," echoed Willis. "We've got something; and we dug all week to get it."

"But it cost us real money—enough to make the business office moan, I expect, too," Miss Donovan added.

"Well, for Pete's sake, shoot!" demanded Farriss. "Cavendish, I suppose?"

The two nodded. Their eyes were alight with enthusiasm.

"In the first place," said the girl, with grave emphasis, "Frederick Cavendish did not die intestate as supposed. He left a will."

Farriss blinked. "By God!" he exclaimed. "That's interesting. There was no evidence of that before."

"I got that from the servants of the College Club," Willis interposed. "The will was drawn the night before the murder. And the man that drew it was Patrick Enright, of Enright and Dougherty. Cavendish took away a copy of it in his pocket. And, Mr. Farriss, I got something else, too—Enright and young John Cavendish are in communication further. I saw him leaving Enright's office all excited. Following my hunch, I cultivated Miss Healey, Enright's stenographer, and learned that the two had an altercation and that it was evidently over some document."

Farriss was interested.

"Enright's in this deep," he muttered thoughtfully, "but how? Well—what else?"

Stella Donovan began speaking now:

"I fixed it with Chambers, the manager of the Fairmount, to get Josette La Baum—she's Valois's *fiancée*, you remember—into the hotel as a maid. Josette 'soaped the keyhole' of the drawers in John Cavendish's rooms there. I had a key made from the soap impression, and from the contents of the correspondence we found I learned that Celeste La Rue, the blonde of the *Revue*, had got some kind of hold on him. It isn't love, either; it's something stronger. He jumps when she holds the hoop."

"La Rue's mixed up in this deeply, too," Willis cut in. "Neither one of us could shadow her without uncovering ourselves, so we hired an International operative. They cost ten dollars a day—and expenses. What he learned was this—that while she was playing with young Cavendish and seeing him almost daily, the lovely Celeste was also in communication with—guess who!"

"Enright?" Farriss ventured.

"Exactly—Enright," he concluded, lighting his half-smoked cigarette.

"Well," the city editor tapped his desk; "you two have done pretty well, so far.

You've got considerable dope. Now, what do you make of it?"

He bent an inquiring gaze on both the girl and the youth.

"You do the talking, Jerry," Miss Donovan begged Willis; "I'm very tired."

Willis was only too eager; Willis was young, enthusiastic, reliable—three reasons why the *Star* kept him.

"It may be a dream," he said, smiling, "but here is the way I stack it up. The night after he quarreled with John, Frederick Cavendish called in Enright and made a will, presumably, cutting John off with practically nothing.

"Immediately after Frederick's departure, Enright calls Carlton's Café and talks to John Cavendish, who had been dining there with Celeste La Rue.

"It is reasonable to suppose that he told him of the will. Less than five hours afterward Frederick Cavendish is found dead in his apartments. Again it is reasonable to suppose that he was croaked by John Cavendish, who wanted to destroy the will so that he could claim the estate.

"These Broadway boys need money when they travel with chorines. Anyhow, the dead man is buried, and John starts spending money like water. One month later he receives a letter—Josette patched the pieces together—asking him to call at Enright's office.

"What happened there is probably this: Young Cavendish was informed of the existence of the will, and it was offered to him at a price which he couldn't afford to pay—just then.

"Perhaps he was frightened into signing a promise to pay as soon as he came into the estate—tricked by Enright. Enright, as soon as he heard no will had been found in Frederick's effects, may have figured that perhaps John killed him, or even if he did not, that, nevertheless, he could use circumstances to extract money from the youngster, who, even if innocent, would fear the trial and notoriety that would follow if Enright publicly disclosed the existence of that will.

"John Cavendish may be innocent, or he may be guilty, but one thing is certain—he's being badgered to death by two

people, from what little we know. One of them is the La Rue woman; the other is Enright.

"Now I wonder—Mr. Farriss, doesn't it occur to you that they may be working together like the woman and the man in the Skittles case last year? You remember then they got a youngster in their power and nearly trimmed him down to his eye-teeth!"

Farriss sat reflecting deeply, chewing the stem of his dead pipe.

"There's something going on—that's as plain as a red banner-head. You've got a peach of a start, so far, and done good pussyfooting—you, too, Stella—but there's one thing that conflicts with your hypothesis—"

The two leaned forward.

"Valois's statement that he was almost positive that the dead man was not Cavendish," the city editor snapped.

"I now believe Valois is mistaken, in view of developments," said Willis with finality. "So does Stella—Miss Donovan, I mean. Remember the body was charred across the face and chest—and Valois was excited."

Farriss was silent a moment.

"Stick to it a while longer," he rapped out; "and get La Rue and Cavendish together at their meeting-place, if you can discover it."

"We can!" interjected Willis. "That's something I learned less than an hour ago. It's Steinway's Café, the place the police picked up Frisco Danny and Mad Mike Meighan two years ago. I followed them, but could not get near enough to hear what they said."

"Then hop to it," Farriss rejoined. "Stick around there until you get something deeper. As for me—I'm going home. It's two o'clock."

CHAPTER VI.

AT STEINWAY'S.

IT was the second night after Farriss had given them his instructions that Miss Donovan and Willis, sitting in the last darkened booth in Steinway's Café, were

rewarded for their vigil. The booth they occupied was selected for the reason that it immediately joined that into which Willis had but three days before seen Cavendish and the La Rue woman enter, and now as they sat toying with their food their eyes commanding the entire room, saw a woman swing into the café entrance and enter the booth directly ahead of them.

"La Rue!" whispered Willis to Miss Donovan.

Ten minutes later a young man entered the café, swept it quickly with his eyes, then made directly for the enclosure occupied by his innamorata. The man was Cavendish.

In the booth behind, Miss Donovan and Willis were all attention, their ears strained to catch the wisps of conversation that eddied over the low partition.

"Pray for the orchestra to stop playing," whispered Miss Donovan, and, strangely enough, as she uttered the words the violins obeyed, leaving the room comparatively quiet in which it was not impossible to catch stray sentences of the subdued conversation.

"Well, I'm here." It was John's voice, an ill-humored voice, too. "But this is the last time, Celeste. These meetings are dangerous."

"Yes—when you talk so loud." Her soft voice scarcely reached the listeners. "But this time there was a good reason." She laughed. "You didn't think it was love, did you, deary?"

"Oh, cut that out!" disgustedly. "I have been foolish enough to satisfy even your vanity. You want more money, I suppose."

"Well, of course," her voice hardening. "Naturally I feel that I should share in your good fortune. But the amount I want now, and must have to-night—to-night, John Cavendish—is not altogether for myself. I've heard from the West."

"My God! Has he been located?"

"Yes, and is safe for the present. Here, read this telegram. It's not very clear, but Beaton wants money and asks me to bring it."

"You? Why does he need you?"

"Lack of nerve, I guess; he's out of his

element in that country. If it was the Bowery he'd do this sort of job better. Anyhow, I'm going, and I want a roll. We can't either of us afford to lie down now."

Cavendish half smothered an oath.

"Money," he ejaculated fiercely. "That is all I hear. Enright has held me up something fierce, and you never let me alone. Suppose I say I haven't got it."

"Why, then, I'd laugh at you, that's all. You may not love me any more, my dear, but surely you have no occasion to consider me a fool. I endeavor to keep posted on what the court is doing in our case; I am naturally interested, you know. You were at the Commercial National Bank this afternoon."

"How the devil did you know that?"

"I play my cards safe," she laughed mirthlessly. "I could even tell you the size of your check, and that the money is still on your person. You intended to place it in a safe-deposit box and keep it hidden for your own use."

"You hellion, you!" Cavendish's voice rose high, then later Miss Donovan heard him say more softly: "How much do you want?"

"Ten thousand. I'm willing enough to split fifty-fifty. This Colorado job is getting to be expensive, deary. I wouldn't dare draw on you through the banks."

Miss Donovan had only time to nudge Willis enthusiastically before she overheard the next plea.

"Celeste, are you trimming me again?"

"Don't be a fool!" came back in subdued tones. "Do you think that telegram is a fake? My Gawd—that is what I want money for! Moreover, I should think you would be tickled, Johnnie boy, to get me out of town—and the price is so low."

In the back booth Willis muttered:

"God, things are going great." Then he bent his ear to sedulous attention and again he could hear the voice of Cavendish.

"You've got to tell me what you're going to do with the money," it said.

The La Rue woman's answer could not be heard; evidently it was a whispered one, and therefore of utmost importance. Came a pause, a clink of glasses, and then a few straggling words filtered over the partition.

"Isn't that the best way?" Celeste La Rue's voice was easily recognizable. "Of course it will be a—well, a mere accident, and no questions asked."

"But if the man should talk!"

"Forget it! Ned Beaton is an oyster. Besides, I've got the screws on him. Come on, Johnnie boy, don't be a fool. We are in this game and must play it out. It has been safe enough so far, and I know what I am doing now. You've got too much at stake to haggle over a few thousand, when the money has come to you as easily as this has. Why, if I'd breathe a word of what I know in this town—"

"For God's sake, not so loud!"

"Bah! No one here is paying any attention to us. Enright is the only one who even suspicions, and his mouth is shut. It makes me laugh to think how easily the fools were gulled. We've got a clear field if you will only let me play the game out in my own way. Do I get the money?"

He must have acceded, for his voice no longer rose to a high pitch. Presently, when the orchestra began playing again, Miss Donovan and Willis judged the pair were giving their attention to the dinner. Finally, after an hour had passed, Cavendish emerged from the booth, went to the check-room, and hurriedly left the café. Waiting only long enough to satisfy herself that Cavendish was gone, Celeste La Rue herself emerged from the booth and paused for a moment beside its bamboo curtains. Then turning suddenly, she made her way, not toward the exit of the café, but to another small booth near the check-room, and into this she disappeared.

But before she had started this short journey, a yellow piece of paper, closely folded, slipped from her belt where it had been tucked.

"It's the telegram! The one of which they were speaking." Miss Donovan's voice whispered dramatically as her eyes swept the tiny clue within their ambit.

Willis started. He almost sprung from the booth to pick it up, but the girl withheld him with a pressure of the hand.

"Not yet," she begged. "Wait until we see who leaves the other booth into which La Rue just went."

And Willis fell back into the seat, his pulse pounding. Presently, with starting eyes, they beheld Celeste La Rue leave the booth, and then five minutes later a well-dressed man, a suave, youthful man with a head inclined toward baldness.

"Enright!" muttered Willis.

"Enright," echoed Miss Donovan, "and, Jerry, our hunch was right. He and La Rue are playing Cavendish—and for something big. But now is our time to get the telegram. Quick—before the waiter returns."

At her words Willis was out of the booth. As Miss Donovan watched, she saw him pass by the folded evidence. What was wrong? But, no—suddenly she saw his handkerchief drop, saw him an instant later turn and pick it up, and with it the telegram. Disappearing in the direction of the men's room, he returned a moment later, paid the check, and with Miss Donovan on his arm left the café.

Outside, and three blocks away from Steinway's, they paused under an arc-light, and with shaking hands Willis showed her the message. There in the flickering rays the girl read its torn and yet enlightening message.

Colorado, May 19, 1915.
him safe. Report and collect.
come with roll Monday sure
I've seen papers. Remember Haskell.
NED.

"It's terribly cryptic, Jerry," she said to the other, "but two things we know from it."

"One is that La Rue's going to blow the burg some day—soon."

"The other, that 'Ned' is Ned Beaton, the man mentioned back there in Steinway's. Whatever his connection is, we don't know. I think we had better go to Farriss, don't you?"

"A good hunch," Willis replied, taking her arm. "And let's move on it quick. One of us may have to hop to Colorado if Farriss thinks well of what we've dug up."

"I hope it's you—you've worked hard," said Miss Donovan.

"But you got the big clue of it all—the telegram," gallantly returned her companion, as he raised his arm to signal a

passing cab which would take them to the Star office.

Once there, in their enthusiasm they upset the custom of the office and broke into Farriss's fullest hour, dragged him from his slot in the copy desk and into his private office, which he rarely used. There, into his impatient ears they dinned the story of what they had just learned, ending up by passing him the telegram.

For a mere instant he glanced at them, then his lips began to move. "Beaton—Ned—Ned Beaton—Ned Beaton," he mused, and then sat bolt upright in his chair, while he banged the desk with a round, hard fist. "Hell's bells!" he ejaculated. "You've run across something. I know that name. I know the man. Ned Beaton is a 'gun,' and he pulled his first job when I was doing 'police' in Philadelphia for the *Record*. Well, well, my children, this is splendid! And what next?"

"But, Mr. Farriss, where is he?" put in Stella Donovan. "Where was the message sent from? Colorado, yes, but where in Colorado. That's the thing to find out."

"I thought it might be the last word in the message—Haskell," ventured Willis.

Mr. Farriss paused a moment, then, "Boy!" he yelled through the open door. "Boy, get me an atlas here quick, or I'll hang your hair on a proof-hook!"

A young hopeful, frightened into frenzy, obeyed with alacrity, and Farriss, seizing the atlas from his hand, thumbed it until he found a map of Colorado. Together the three pored over it.

"There it is!" Stella Donovan cried suddenly. "Down toward the bottom. Looks like desert country."

"Pretty dry place for Celeste," laughed Willis. "I might call her up and kid her about it if—"

Farriss looked at him sourly. "You might get a raise in salary," he snapped sharply, "if you'd keep your mind on the job. What you *can* do is call up, say you're the detective bureau, and ask carelessly about Beaton. That'll throw a scare into her. You've got her number?"

"Riverside 7683," Willis said in a businesslike voice. "The Beecher apartments. I'll try it."

He disappeared into the clattering local room, to return a moment later, white of face, bright of eye, and with lips parted.

"What's the dope?" Farriss shot at him.

"Nothing!" cried the excited young man. "Nothing except that fifteen minutes ago Celeste La Rue kissed the Beecher apartments good-by and, with trunk, puff, and toothbrush, beat it."

"To Haskell," added the city editor, "or my hair is pink. And by God, I believe there's a story there. What's more, I believe we can get it. It's a blind chance, but we'll take it."

"Let Mr. Willis—" began Miss Donovan.

"Mind your own business, Stella," commanded Farriss, "and see that your hat's on straight. Because within half an hour you're going to draw on the night cashier for five hundred dollars and pack your little portmanteau for Haskell."

Willis's face fell. "Can't I go, too," he began, but Farriss silenced him on the instant.

"Kid," he said sharply but kindly, "you're too good a hound for the desert. The city needs you here—and, dammit, you keep on sniffing."

Turning to the unsettled girl beside him, he went on briskly:

"Work guardedly; query us when you have to; be sure of your facts, and consign your soul to God. Do I see you moving?"

And when Farriss looked again he did.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS DONOVAN ARRIVES.

WHEN the long overland train paused a moment before the ancient box car that served as the depot for the town of Haskell, nestled in the gulch half a mile away, it deposited Miss Stella Donovan almost in the arms of Carson, the station-agent, and he, wary of the wiles of women and the ethics of society, promptly turned her over to Jim Westcott, who had come down to inquire if the station-agent held a telegram for him—a telegram that he expected from the East.

"She oughtn't to hike to the Timmons

House alone, Jim," Carson said. "This yere is pay-day up at the big mines, an' the boys are havin' a hell of a time. That's them yellin' down yonder, and they're mighty likely to mix up with the Bar X gang before mornin', bein' how the liquor is runnin' like blood in the streets o' Lundun, and there's half a mile between 'em."

In view of these disclosures, Miss Donovan welcomed the courteous acquiescence of Westcott, whom she judged to be a man of thirty-one, with force and character—these written in the lines of his big body and his square, kind face.

"I'm Miss Stella Donovan of New York," she said directly.

"And I," he returned, with hat off in the deepening gloom, "am Jim Westcott, who plugs away at a mining claim over yonder."

"There!" laughed the girl frankly. "We're introduced. And I suppose we can start for the Timmons House."

As her words trailed off there came again the sound of yelling, sharp cries, and revolver shots from the gulch below where lights twinkled faintly.

Laughing warmly, Westcott picked up her valise, threw a "So-long" to Carson, and with Miss Donovan close behind him, began making for the distant lights of the Timmons House. As they followed the road, which paralleled a whispering stream, the girl began to draw him out skilfully, and was amazed to find that for all of his rough appearance he was excellently educated and a gentleman of taste. Finally the reason came out.

"I'm a college man," he explained proudly. "So was my partner—same class. But one can't always remain in the admirable East, and three years ago he and I came here prospecting. Actually struck some pay-dirt in the hills yonder, too, but it sort of petered out on us."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Miss Donovan's condolence was genuine.

"We lost the ore streak. It was broken in two by some upheaval of nature. We were still trying to find it when my partner's father died and he went East to claim the fortune that was left. I couldn't work alone, so I drifted away, and didn't come back until about four months ago,

when I restaked the claim and went to work again."

"You had persistence, Mr. Westcott," the girl laughed.

"It was rewarded. I struck the vein again—when my last dollar was gone. That was a month ago. I wired my old partner for help, but—" He stopped, listening intently.

They were nearing a small bridge over Bear Creek, the sounds of Haskell's revelers growing nearer and louder. Suddenly they heard an oath and a shot, and the next moment a wild rider, lashing a foaming horse with a stinging quirt, was upon them. Westcott barely had time to swing the girl to safety as the tornado flew past.

"The drunken fool!" he muttered quietly. "A puncher riding for camp. There will be more up ahead probably."

His little act of heroism drew the man strangely near to Miss Donovan, and as they hurried along in the silent night she felt that above all he was dependable, as if, too, she had known him months, aye years, instead of a scant hour. And in this strange country she needed a friend.

"Now that I've laid bare my past," he was saying, "don't you think you might tell me why you are here?"

The girl stiffened. To say that she was from the New York *Star* would close many avenues of information to her. No, the thing to do was to adopt some "stall" that would enable her to idle about as much as she chose. Then the mad horseman gave her the idea.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I forgot I hadn't mentioned it. I'm assigned by *Scribbler's Magazine* to do an article on 'The Old West, Is It Really Gone?' and, Mr. Westcott, I think I have a lovely start."

A few moments later she thanked Providence for her precaution, for her companion resumed the story of his mining claim.

"It's mighty funny I haven't heard from that partner. It isn't like him not to answer my wire. That's why I've waited every night at the depot. No, it's not like 'Pep,' even if he does take his leisure at the College Club."

Miss Donovan's spine tingled at the mention of the name: "Pep," she mur-

mured, trying to be calm. "What was his other name?"

"Cavendish," Westcott replied. "Frederick Cavendish."

A gasp almost escaped the girl's lips. Here, within an hour, she had linked the many Eastern clues of the Cavendish affair with one in the West. Was ever a girl so lucky? And immediately her brain began to work furiously as she walked along.

A sudden turn about the base of a large cliff brought them to Haskell, a single street running up the broadening valley, lined mostly with shacks, although a few more pretentious buildings were scattered here and there, while an occasional tent flapped its discolored canvas in the night wind. There were no street lamps, and only a short stretch of wooden sidewalk, but lights blazed in various windows, shedding illumination without, and revealing an animated scene.

They went forward, Westcott, in spite of his confident words, watchful and silent, the valise in one hand, the other grasping her arm. The narrow stretch of sidewalk was jammed with men, surging in and out through the open door of a saloon, and the two held to the middle of the road, which was lined with horses tied to long poles. Men reeled out into the street, and occasionally the sharp crack of some frolicsome revolver, punctuated the hoarse shouts, and bursts of drunken laughter. No other woman was visible, yet, apparently, no particular attention was paid to their progress. But the stream of men thickened perceptibly, until Westcott was obliged to shoulder them aside good-humoredly in order to open a passage. The girl, glancing in through the open doors, saw crowded bar-rooms, and eager groups about gambling tables. One place dazzlingly lighted, was evidently a dance-hall, but so densely jammed with humanity she could not distinguish the dancers. A blare of music, however, proved the presence of a band within. She felt the increasing pressure of her escort's hand.

"Can we get through?"

"Sure; some crowd, though. 'Tisn't often as bad as this; miners and punchers all paid off at once." He released her arm,

and suddenly gripped the shoulder of a man passing. He was the town marshal.

"Say, Dan, I reckon this is your busy night, but I wish you'd help me run this lady through as far as Timmons; this bunch of long-horns appear to be milling, and we're plum stalled."

The man turned and stared at them. Short, stockily built, appearing at first view almost grotesque under the broad brim of his hat, Stella, recognizing the marshal, was conscious only of a clean-shaven face, a square jaw, and a pair of stern blue eyes.

"Oh, is that you, Jim?" he asked briefly. "Lord, I don't see why a big boob like you should need a guardian. The lady? Pardon me, madam," and he touched his hat. "Stand back there, you fellows. Come on, folks!"

The little marshal knew his business, and it was also evident that the crowd knew the little marshal. Drunk and quarrelsome as many of them were, they made way—the more obstreperous sullenly, but the majority in a spirit of rough good humor. The time had not come for war against authority, and even the most reckless were fully aware that there was a law-and-order party in Haskell, ready and willing to back their officer to the limit. Few were drunk enough as yet to openly defy his authority and face the result, as most of them had previously seen him in action. To the girl it was all terrifying enough—the rough, hairy faces, the muttered threats, the occasional oath, the jostling figures—but the two men, one on each side of her, accepted the situation coolly enough, neither touching the revolver at his belt, but, sternly thrusting aside those in their way, they pressed straight through the surging mass in the man-crowded lobby of the disreputable hotel.

The building itself was a barnlike structure, unpainted, but with a rude, unfinished veranda in front. One end contained a saloon, crowded with patrons, but the office, revealed in the glare of a smoky lamp, disclosed a few occupants, a group of men about a card-table.

At the desk, wide-eyed with excitement, Miss Donovan took a service-worn pen

proffered by landlord Pete Timmons, whose gray whiskers were as unkempt as his hotel, and registered her name.

"A telegram came to-day for you, ma'am," Peter said in a cracked voice, and tossed it over.

Miss Donovan tore it open. It was from Farriss. It read:

If any clues, advise immediately. Willis digging hard. Letter of instruction follows.

FARRISS.

The girl folded the message, thrust it in her jacket-pocket, then turning to the marshal and Westcott, gave each a firm hand.

"You've both been more than kind," she said gratefully.

"Hell, ma'am," Dan deprecated, "that warn't nothin'!" And he hurried into the street as loud cries sounded outside.

"Good night, Miss Donovan," Westcott said simply. "If you are ever frightened or in need of a friend, call on me. I'll be in town two days yet, and after that Pete here can get word to me." Then, with an admiring, honest gaze, he searched her eyes a moment before he turned and strolled toward the rude cigar-case.

"All right, now, ma'am?" Pete Timmons said, picking up her valise. The girl nodded, and together they went up the rude stairs to her room where Timmons paused at the door.

"Well, I'm glad you're here," he said, moving away. "We've been waitin for you to show. I may be wrong, ma'am, but I'd bet my belt that you're the lady that's been expected by Ned Beaton."

"You're mistaken," she replied shortly.

As she heard him clatter down the stairs, Miss Stella Donovan of the New York *Star* knew that her visit would not be in vain.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GANG OF ENEMIES.

THE miner waited, leaning against the desk. His eyes had followed the slender figure moving after the ro-tund Timmons up the uncarpeted stairs

until it had vanished amid the shadows of the second story. He smiled quietly in imagination of her first astonished view of the interior of room eighteen, and recalled to mind a vivid picture of its adornments—the bare wood walls, the springless bed, the crack-nosed pitcher standing disconsolate in a blue wash-basin of tin; the little round mirror in a once-gilt frame with a bullet-hole through its center, and the strip of dingy rag-carpet on the floor—all this suddenly displayed by the yellowish flame of a small hand-lamp left sitting on the window ledge.

Timmons came down the stairs, and bustled in back of the desk, eager to ask questions.

"Lady a friend o' yours, Jim?" he asked. "If I'd a knowed she wus comin' I'd a saved a better room."

"I have never seen her until to-night, Pete. She got off the train, and Carson asked me to escort her up-town—it was dark, you know. How did she like the palatial apartment?"

"Well, she didn't say nothin'; just sorter looked around. I reckon she's a good sport, all right. What do ye suppose she's come yere for?"

"Not the slightest idea; I take it that's her business."

"Sure; but a feller can't help wonderin', can he? Donovan," he mused, peering at the name; "that's Irish, I take it—hey?"

"Suspiciously so; you are some detective, Pete. I'll give you another clue—her eyes are Irish gray."

He sauntered across to the stove, and stood looking idly at the card-players, blue wreaths of tobacco smoke circling up from the bowl of his pipe. Some one opened the street door, letting in a babel of noise, and walked heavily across the office floor. Westcott turned about to observe the newcomer. He was a burly, red-faced man, who had evidently been drinking heavily, yet was not greatly under the influence of liquor, dressed in a checked suit of good cut and fashion, but hardly in the best of taste. His hat, a Stetson, was pushed back on his head, and an unlighted cigar was clinched tightly between his teeth. He

bore all the earmarks of a commercial traveler of a certain sort—a domineering personality, making up by sheer nerve what he might lack in brains. But for his words the miner would have given the fellow no further thought.

"Say, Timmons," he burst forth noisily, and striding over to the desk, "the marshal tells me a dame blew in from New York to-night—is she registered here?"

The landlord shoved the book forward, with one finger on the last signature.

"Yep," he said shortly, "but she ain't the one you wus lookin' for—I asked her that, furst thing."

"Stella Donovan—huh! That's no name ever I heard; what's she look like?"

"Like a lady, I reckon; I ain't seen one fer quite a spell now."

"Dark or light?"

"Waal, sorter medium, I should say; brown hair with a bit o' red in it, an' a pair o' gray eyes full of fun—some girl, to my notion."

The questioner struck his fist on the wood sharply.

"Well, what the devil do you suppose such a woman has come to this hole clear from New York for, Timmons? What's her game, anyhow?"

"Blessed if I know," and the proprietor seated himself on a high stool. "I didn't ask no questions like that; maybe the gent by the stove there might give yer all the information yer want. He brought her up from the dapoo, an' kin talk English. Say, Jim, this yere is a short horn frum New York, named Beaton, an' he seems ter be powerfully interested in skirts—Beaton, Mr. Jim Westcott."

The two men looked at each other, the miner-stepping slightly forward, and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. Beaton laughed, assuming a semblance of good nature.

"My questions were prompted solely by curiosity," he explained, evidently not wholly at ease. "I was expecting a young woman, and thought this new arrival might prove to be my friend."

"Hardly," returned Westcott dryly. "As the landlord informed you, Miss Donovan is a lady."

If he expected this shot to take effect he was disappointed, for the grin never left Beaton's face.

"Ah, a good joke; a very good joke, indeed. But you misunderstand; this is altogether a business matter. This young woman whom I expect is coming here on a mining deal—it is not a love affair at all. I assure you."

Westcott's eyes sparkled, yet without merriment.

"Quite pleased to be so assured," he answered carelessly. "In what manner can I satisfy your curiosity? You have already been informed, I believe, that the person relative to whom you inquire is a Miss Stella Donovan, of New York; that she has the appearance and manners of a lady, and possesses brown hair and gray eyes. Is there anything more?"

"Why, no—certainly not."

"I thought possibly you might care to question me regarding my acquaintance with the young woman?" Westcott went on, his voice hardening slightly. "If so, I have not the slightest objection to telling you that it consists entirely of acting as her escort from the station to the hotel. I do not know why she is here, how long she intends staying, or what her purpose may be. Indeed, there is only one fact I do know which may be of interest to you."

Beaton, surprised by the language of the other, remained silent, his face turning purple, as a suspicion came to him that he was being made a fool of.

"It is this, my friend—who she is, what she is, and why she happens to be here, is none of your damn business, and if you so much as mention her name again in my presence you are going to regret it to your dying day. That's all."

Beaton, glancing about at the uplifted faces of the card-players, chose to assume an air of indifference, which scarcely accorded with the anger in his eyes.

"Ah, come now," he blurted forth, "I didn't mean anything; there's no harm done—let's have a drink, and be friends."

Westcott shook his head.

"No, I think not," he said slowly. "I'm not much of a drinking man myself, and when I do I choose my own company. But

let me tell you something, Beaton, for your own good. I know your style, and you are mighty apt to get into trouble out here if you use any Bowery tactics."

"Bowery tactics!"

"Yes; you claim to live in New York, and you possess all the earmarks of the East-Side bad man. There is nothing keeping you now from roughing it with me but the sight of this gun in my belt, and a suspicion in your mind that I may know how to use it. That suspicion is correct. Moreover, you will discover this same ability more or less prevalent throughout this section. However, I am not looking for trouble; I am trying to avoid it. I haven't sought your company; I do not want to know you. Now you go back to your bar-room where you will find plenty of your own kind to associate with. It's going to be dangerous for you to hang around here any longer."

Beaton felt the steady eyes upon him, but was carrying enough liquor to make him reckless. Still his was naturally the instinct of the New York gunman, seeking for some adventure. He stepped backward feigning a laugh, watchful to catch Westcott off his guard.

"All right, then," he said, "I'll go get the drink; you can't bluff me."

Westcott's knowledge of the class alone brought to him the man's purpose. Beaton's hand was in the pocket of his coat, and, as he turned, apparently to leave the room, the cloth bulged. With one leap forward the miner was at his throat. There was a report, a flash of flame, the speeding bullet striking the stove, and the next instant, Beaton, his hand still helplessly imprisoned within the coat-pocket, was hurled back across the card-table, the players scattering to get out of the way. All the pent-up dislike in Westcott's heart found expression in action; the despicable trick wrought him to a sudden fury, yet even then there came to him no thought of killing the fellow, no memory even of the loaded gun at his hip. He wanted to choke him, strike him with his hands.

"You dirty coward," he muttered fiercely. "So you thought the pocket trick was a new one out here, did you? Come, give

the gun up! Oh! so there is some fight left in you? Then let's settle it here."

It was a struggle between two big, strong men—the one desperate, unscrupulous, brutal; the other angry enough, but retaining self-control. They crashed onto the floor, Westcott still retaining the advantage of position, and twice he struck, driving his clenched fist home. Suddenly he became aware that some one had jerked his revolver from its holster, and, almost at the same instant a hard hand gripped the neck-band of his shirt and tore him loose from Beaton.

"Here, now—enough of that, Jim," said a voice sternly, and his hands arose instinctively as he recognized the gleam of two drawn weapons fronting him. "Help Beaton up, Joe. Now, look yere, Mr. Bully Westcott," and the speaker shook his gun threateningly. "As it happens, you have jumped on a friend o' ours, an' we naturally propose to take a hand in this game—you know me!"

Westcott nodded, an unpleasant smile on his lips.

"I do, Lacy," he said coolly, "and that if there is any dirty work going on in this camp, it is quite probable you and your gang are in it. So, this New Yorker is a protégé of yours?"

"That's none of your business; we're here for fair play."

"Since when? Now listen; you've got me covered, and that is my gun which Moore has in his hand. I cannot fight you alone and unarmed; but I can talk yet."

"I reckon yer can, if thet's goin' ter do yer eny good."

"So the La Rosita Mining Company is about to be revived, is it? Eastern capital becoming interested. I've heard rumors of that for a week past. What's the idea? Struck anything?"

Lacy, a long, rangy fellow, with a heavy mustache, and a scar over one eye, partially concealed by his hat brim, grinned at the others as though at a good joke.

"No, nuthin' particular as yet," he answered; "but you hev', an' I reckon thet's just about as good. Tryin' ter keep it dark, wasn't yer? Never even thought we'd caught on."

"Oh, yes, I did; you flatter yourselves. I caught one of your stool-pigeons up the gulch yesterday, and more than ten days ago Moore and Edson made a trip into my tunnel while I happened to be away; they forgot to hide their trail. I knew what you were up to, and you can all of you look for a fight."

"When your partner gets out here, I suppose," sneered Lacy.

"He'll be here."

"Oh, will he? Well, he's a hell of a while coming. You wired him a month ago, and yer've written him twice since. Oh, I've got the cases on you, all right, Westcott. I know you haven't got a cent left to go on with, and nowhere to get eny except through him." He laughed. "Ain't that right? Well, then, yer chances look mighty slim ter me just at present, ol'-timer. However, there's no fight on yet; will yer behave yerself, an' let this man Beaton alone if I hand yer back yer gun?"

"There is no choice left me."

"Sure; that's sensible enough; give it to him, Moore."

He broke the chamber, shaking the cartridges out into his palm; then handed the emptied weapon over to Westcott. His manner was purposely insulting, but the latter stood with lips firmly set, realizing his position.

"Now, then, go on over thar an' sit down," continued Lacy. "Maybe, if yer wait long enough, that partner o' yours might blow in. I got some curiosity myself as to why that girl showed up ter-night under yer guidance, an' why yer so keen ter fight about her, Jim; but I reckon we'll clear that up ter-morrow without makin' yer talk."

"You mean to question Miss Donovan?"

"Hell, no; just keep an eye on her. 'Tain't likely she's in Haskell just fer the climate. Come on, boys, let's liquor. Big Jim Westcott has his claws cut, and it's Beaton's turn to spend a little."

Westcott sat quietly in the chair as they filed out; then took the pipe from his pocket and filled it slowly. He realized his defeat, his helplessness, but his mind was already busy with the future.

Timmons came out from behind the desk a bit solicitous.

"Hurt eny?" he asked. "Didn't wing yer, or nuthin'?"

"No; the stove got the bullet. He shot through his pocket."

"Whut's all the row about?"

"Oh, not much, Timmons; this is my affair," and Westcott lit his pipe with apparent indifference. "Lacy and I have got two mining claims tapping the same lead, that's all. There's been a bit o' feeling between us for some time. I reckon it's got to be fought out, now."

"Then yer've really struck ore?"

"Yes."

"And the young woman? Hes she got anything ter do with it?"

"Not a thing, Timmons; but I want to keep her out of the hands of that bunch. Give me a lamp and I'll go up-stairs and think this game out."

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT AND A MORNING.

STELLA DONOVAN never forgot the miseries of her first night in Haskell.

When old man Timmons finally left her, after placing the flaring lamp on a chair, and went pattering back down the bare hall, she glanced shudderingly about at her unpleasant surroundings, none too pleased with the turn of events.

The room was scarcely large enough to contain the few articles of furniture absolutely required. Its walls were of unplanned plank occasionally failing to meet, and the only covering to the floor was a dingy strip of rag-carpet. The bed was a cot, shapeless, and propped up on one side by the iron leg of some veranda bench, while the open window looked out into the street. There was a bolt, not appearing particularly secure, with which Miss Donovan immediately locked the door before venturing across to take a glance without.

The view was hardly reassuring, as the single street was still the scene of pandemonium, the saloon and dance-hall almost directly opposite, operating in full blast. Oaths and ribald laughter assailed her ears,

while directly beneath, although out of her view, a quarrel threatened to lead to serious consequences. She pulled down the window to shut out these sounds, but the room became so stuffy and hot without even this slight ventilation, as to oblige her opening it again. As a compromise she hauled down the curtain, a green paper affair, torn badly, and which occasionally flapped in the wind with a startling noise.

The bed-clothing, once turned back and inspected, was of a nature to prevent the girl from disrobing; but finally she lay down, seeking such rest as was possible, after turning the flickering flames of the lamp as low as she dared, and then finally blowing it out altogether. The glare from the street crept in through the cracks in the curtain, playing in fantastic light and shadow across ceiling and wall, while the infernal din never ceased.

Sleep was not to be attained, although she closed her eyes and muffled her ears. The misshapen bed brought no comfort to her tired body, for no matter how she adjusted herself, the result was practically the same. Not even her mind rested.

Miss Donovan was not naturally of a nervous disposition. She had been brought up very largely to rely upon herself, and life had never been sufficiently easy for her to find time in which to cultivate nerves. Her newspaper training had been somewhat strenuous, and had won her a reputation in New York for unusual fearlessness and devotion to duty. Yet this situation was so utterly different, and so entirely unexpected, that she confessed to herself she would be very glad to be safely out of it.

A revolver shot rang out sharply from one of the rooms below, followed by the sound of loud voices, and a noise of struggle. The startled girl sat upright on the cot, listening, but the disturbance ceased almost immediately, and she finally lay down again, her heart still beating wildly. Her thoughts, never still, wandered over the events of the evening—the arrival at Haskell station, the strange meeting with Westcott, and the sudden revelation that he was the partner of Frederick Cavendish.

The big, good-natured miner had interested her from the first as representing a

perfect type of her preconceived ideal of the real Westerner. She had liked the firm character of his face, the quiet, thoughtful way in which he acted, the whole unobtrusive bearing of the man. Then, as they had walked that long mile together in the darkness, she had learned things about him—little glimpses of his past, and of dawning hopes—which only served to increase her confidence. Already he had awakened her trust; she felt convinced that if she needed friendship, advice, even actual assistance, here was one whom she could implicitly trust.

The racket outside died away slowly. She heard various guests return to their rooms, staggering along the hall and fumbling at their doors; voices echoed here and there, and one fellow, mistaking his domicil entirely, struggled with her latch in a vain endeavor to gain entrance. She was upon her feet, when companions arrived and led the invader elsewhere, their loud laughter dying away in the distance. It was long after this before nature finally conquered and the girl slept outstretched on the hard cot, the first faint gray of dawn already visible in the eastern sky.

She was young, though, and she awoke rested and refreshed, in spite of the fact that her body ached at first from the discomfort of the cot. The sunlight rested in a sheet of gold on her drawn curtain, and the silence of the morning, following so unexpectedly the dismal racket of the night, seemed to fairly shock her into consciousness. Could this be Haskell? Could this indeed be the inferno into which she had been precipitated from the train in the darkness of the evening before? She stared about at the bare, board walls, the bullet-scarred mirror, the cracked pitcher, before she could fully reassure herself; then stepped upon the disreputable rug, and crossed to the open window.

Haskell at nine in the morning bore but slight resemblance to that same environment during the hours of darkness—especially on a night immediately following payday at the mines. As Miss Donovan, now thoroughly awake, and obsessed by the memory of those past hours of horror, cautiously drew aside the corner of torn

curtain, and gazed down upon the deserted street below, she could scarcely accept the evidence of her own eyes.

True, there were many proofs visible of the wild riot of the evening before—torn papers, emptied bottles, a shattered sign or two, an oil-lamp blown into bits by some well-directed shot, a hat lying in the middle of the road, and a dejected pony or two, still at the hitching-rack, waiting a delayed rider. But, except for these mute reminiscences of past frolic, the long street seemed utterly dead, the doors of saloons and dance-halls closed, the dust swirling back and forth to puffs of wind, the only moving object visible being a gaunt, yellow dog trotting soberly past.

However, it was not upon this view of desolation that Miss Donovan's eyes clung. They had taken all this in at a glance, startled, scarcely comprehending, but the next instant wandered to the marvelous scene revealed beyond that squalid street, and those miserable shacks, to the green beauty of the outspread valley, and the wondrous vista of mountain peaks beyond.

She straightened up, emitting a swift breath of delight, as her wide-open eyes surveyed the marvelous scene of mingled loveliness and grandeur. The stream, curving like a great snake, gleamed amid the acres of green grass, its swift waters sparkling in the sun. Here and there it would dip down between high banks, or disappear for a moment behind a clump of willows, only to reappear in broader volume. Beyond, seemingly at no distance at all, yet bordered by miles of turf and desert, the patches of vivid green interspersed with the darker coloring of spruce, and the outcropping of brown rocks, the towering peaks of a great mountain-chain swept up into the clear blue of the sky, black almost to their summits, which were dazzling with the white of unmelted snow. Marvelous, awe-inspiring as the picture was in itself alone, it was rendered even more wonderful when contrasted with the ugly squalidness of the town below, its tents and shacks sprawling across the flat, the sunlight revealing its dust and desolation.

The girl's first exclamation of delight

died away as she observed these works of man projected against this screen of nature's building; yet her eyes dwelt lovingly for some time on the far-flung line of mountains, before she finally released the green shade, and shut out the scene. Her toilet was a matter of but a few minutes, although she took occasion to slip on a fresh waist, and to brighten up the shoes, somewhat soiled by the tramp through the thick dust the evening before. Indeed, it was a very charming young woman, her dress and appearance quite sufficiently Eastern, who finally ventured out into the rough hall, and down the single flight of stairs. The hotel was silent, except for the heavy breathing of a sleeper in one of the rooms she passed, and a melancholy-looking Chinaman, apparently engaged in chamber work at the further end of the hall. Timmons was alone in the office, playing with a shaggy dog, and the floor remained unswept, while a broken chair still bore evidence of the debauch of the previous night. The landlord greeted her rather sullenly, his eyes heavy and red from lack of sleep.

"Morning," he said, without attempting to rise. "Lie down thar, Towser; the lady don't likely want yer nosin' around. Yer a bit late fer breakfast; it's ginerally over with by eight o'clock."

"I am not at all hungry," she answered. "Is it far to the post-office?"

"'Bout two blocks, ter yer right. If yer intendin' ter stay yere, ye better have yer mail sent ter the hotel."

"Thank you; I'll see. I do not know yet the length of my stay."

"Are ye yere on business?"

"Partly; but it may require only a few days."

"Waal, if yer do stay over, maybe I kin fix yer up a bit more comfortable-like."

Thar'll be some drummers a goin' out to-day, I reckon."

"Thank you very much; I'll let you know what I decide the moment I know myself. Is that a hunting-dog?"

"Bones mostly," he responded gloomily, but stroking the animal's head. "Leastwise, he ain't been trained none. I just naturally like a darg round fer company—they sorter seem homelike."

She passed out into the bright sunshine, and clear mountain air. The board-walk ended at the corner of the hotel, but a narrow cinder-path continued down that side of the street for some distance. The houses were scattered, the vacant spaces between grown up to weeds, and more or less ornamented by tin cans, and as she advanced she encountered only two pedestrians—a cowboy, so drunk that he hung desperately to the upper board of a fence in order to let her pass, staring at her as if she was some vision, and a burly fellow in a checked suit, with some mail in his hand, who stopped after they had passed each other, and gazed back at her as though more than ordinarily interested. From the hotel stoop he watched until she vanished within the general store, which contained the post-office.

Through the rude window the clerk pushed a plain manila envelope into her outstretched hand. Evidently from the thinness of the letter, Farriss had but few instructions to give and, thrusting the unopened missive into her hand-bag, she retraced her steps to her room.

There she vented a startled gasp. The suit-case which she had left closed upon the floor was open—wide open—its contents disarranged. Some one had rummaged it thoroughly. And Miss Donovan knew that she was under suspicion.


TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

A Woman
Who Did
Things

CHASE OF THE LINDA BELLE

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

NEXT
WEEK



A Simple Act of Piety

by Achmed
Abdullah

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

HIS affair that night was prosy. He was intending the murder of an old Spanish woman around the corner, on the Bowery, whom he had known for years, with whom he had always exchanged courteous greetings, and whom he neither liked nor disliked.

He did kill her; and she knew that he was going to the minute he came into her stuffy, smelly shop, looming tall and bland, and yellow, and unearthly Chinese from behind the shapeless bundles of second-hand goods that cluttered the doorway. He wished her good evening in tones that were silvery, but seemed tainted by something unnatural. She was uncertain what it was, and this very uncertainty increased her horror. She felt her hair raise as if drawn by a shivery wind.

At the very last she caught a glimmer of the truth in his narrow-lidded, purple-black eyes. But it was too late.

The lean, curved knife was in his hand and across her scraggy throat—there was a choked gurgle, a crimson line broadening to a crimson smear, a thudding fall—and that was the end of the affair as far as she was concerned.

A minute later Nag Hong Fah walked over to the other end of Pell Street and en-

tered a liquor-store which belonged to the Chin Sor Company, and was known as the "Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment." It was the gathering-place for the Chinese-born members of the Nag family, and there he occupied a seat of honor because of his wealth and charity and stout rectitude.

He talked for about half an hour with the other members of his clan, sipping fragrant, sun-dried Formosa tea mixed with jessamine-flowers, until he had made for himself a bullet-proof alibi.

The alibi held.

For he is still at liberty. He is often heard to speak with regret—nor is it hypocritical regret—about the murder of Señora Garcia, the old Spanish woman who kept the shop around the corner. He is a good customer of her nephew, Carlos, who succeeded to her business. Nor does he trade there to atone, in a manner, for the red deed of his hands, but because the goods are cheap.

He regrets nothing. To regret, you must find sin in your heart, while the murder of Señora Garcia meant no sin to him. It was to him a simple action, respectable, even worthy.

For he was a Chinaman, and, although it all happened between the chocolate-

brown of the Hudson and the murky, cloudy gray of the North River, the tale is of the Orient. There is about it an atmosphere of age-green bronze; of first-chop chandoo and spicy aloe-wood; of gilt, carved statues brought out of India when Confucius was young; of faded embroideries, musty with the scent of the dead centuries. An atmosphere which is very sweet, very gentle—and very unhuman.

The Elevated roars above. The bluecoat shuffles his flat feet on the greasy asphalt below. But still the tale is of China—and the dramatic climax, in a Chinaman's story, from a Chinaman's slightly twisted angle, differs from that of an American.

To Nag Hong Fah this climax came not with the murder of Señora Garcia, but with Fanny Mei Hi's laugh as she saw him with the shimmering bauble in his hands and heard his appraisal thereof.

She was his wife, married to him honorably and truly, with a narrow gold band and a clergyman and a bouquet of wired roses bought cheaply from an itinerant Greek vendor, and handfuls of rice thrown by facetious and drunken members of both the yellow race and the white.

Of course, at the time of his marriage, a good many people around Pell Street whispered and gossiped. They spoke of the curling black smoke and slavery and other gorgeously, romantically wicked things. Miss Edith Rutter, the social settlement investigator, spoke of—and to—the police.

Whereas Nag Hong Fah, who had both dignity and a sense of humor, invited them all to his house: gossipers, whisperers, Miss Edith Rutter, and Detective Bill Devoy of the Second Branch, and bade them look to their hearts' content; and whereas they found no opium, no sliding panels, and hidden cupboards, no dread Mongol mysteries, but a neat little steam-heated flat, furnished by Grand Rapids via Fourteenth Street, German porcelain, a case of blond Milwaukee beer, a five-pound humidior of shredded Kentucky burlap tobacco, a victrola, and a fine, big Bible with brass clamp and edges and M. Doré's illustrations.

"Call again," he said as they were trooping down the narrow stairs. "Call again

any time you please. Glad to have you—aren't we, kid?" chucking his wife under the chin.

"You bet yer life, you fat old yellow sweetness!" agreed Fanny; and then—as a special barbed shaft leveled at Miss Rutter's retreating back: "Say! Any time yer wanta lamp my wedding certificate—it's hangin' between the fottographs of the President and the Big Boss—all framed up swell!"

He had met her first one evening in a Bowery saloon, where she was introduced to him by Mr. Brian Neill, the owner of the saloon, a gentleman from out the County Armagh, who had spattered and muddled his proverbial Irish chastity in the slime of the Bowery gutters, and who called himself her uncle.

This latter statement had to be taken with a grain of salt. For Fanny Mei Hi was not Irish. Her hair was golden, her eyes blue. But otherwise she was Chinese. Easily nine-tenths of her. Of course she denied it. But that is neither here nor there.

She was not a lady. Couldn't be—don't you see—with that mixed blood in her veins, Mr. Brian Neill acting as her uncle, and the standing pools of East-Side vice about her.

But Nag Hong Fah, who was a poet and a philosopher, besides being the proprietor of the Great Shanghai Chop Suey Palace, said that she looked like a golden-haired goddess of evil, familiar with all the seven sins. And he added—this to the soothsayer of his clan, Nag Hop Fat—that he did not mind her having seven, nor seventeen, nor seven times seventeen bundles of sin, as long as she kept them in the sacred bosom of the Nag family.

"Yes," said the soothsayer, throwing up a handful of painted ivory sticks and watching how they fell to see if the omens were favorable. "Purity is a jewel to the silly young. And you are old, honorable cousin—"

"Indeed," chimed in Nag Hong Fah, "I am old and fat and sluggish and extremely wise. What price is there in purity higher than there is contained in the happiness

and contentment of a respectable citizen when he sees men-children playing gently about his knees?"

He smiled when his younger brother, Nag Sen Yat, the opium merchant, spoke to him of a certain Yung Quai.

"Yung Quai is beautiful," said the opium merchant, "and young—and of an honorable clan—and—"

"*And childless! And in San Francisco! And divorced from me!*"

"But there is her older brother, Yung Long, the head of the Yung clan. He is powerful and rich—the richest man in Pell Street! He would consider this new marriage of yours a disgrace to his face. Chiefly since the woman is a foreigner!"

"She is not. Only her hair and her eyes are foreign."

"Where hair and eyes lead, the call of the blood follows," rejoined Nag Sen Yat, and he reiterated his warning about Yung Long.

But the other shook his head.

"Do not give wings to trouble. It flies swiftly without them," he quoted. "Too, the soothsayer read in the painted sticks that Fanny Mei Hi will bear me sons. One—perhaps two. Afterward, if indeed it be so that the drop of barbarian blood has clouded the clear mirror of her Chinese soul, I can always take back into my household the beautiful and honorable Yung Quai, whom I divorced and sent to California because she is childless. She will then adopt the sons which the other woman will bear me—and everything will be extremely satisfactory."

And so he put on his best American suit, called on Fanny, and proposed to her with a great deal of dignity and elaborate phrases.

"Sure I'll marry you," said Fanny. "Sure! I'd rather be the wife of the fattest, yellowest Chink in New York than live the sorta life I'm livin'—see, Chinkie-Toodles?"

"Chinkie-Toodles" smiled. He looked her over approvingly. He said to himself that doubtless the painted sticks had spoken the truth, that she would bear him men-children. His own mother had been a river-

girl, purchased during a drought for a handful of parched grain; and had died in the odor of sanctity, with nineteen Buddhist priests following her gaily lacquered coffin, wagging their shaven polls ceremoniously, and mumbling flattering and appropriate verses from "Chin-Kong-Ching."

Fanny, on the other hand, though wickedly and lyingly insisting on her pure white blood, knew that a Chinaman is broad-minded and free-handed, that he makes a good husband, and beats his wife rather less often than a white man of the corresponding scale of society.

Of course, gutter-bred, she was aggressively insistent upon her rights.

"Chinkie-Toodles," she said the day before the wedding, and the gleam in her eyes gave point to the words, "I'm square—see? An' I'm goin' to travel square. Maybe I haven't always been a poifec' lady, but I ain't goin' to bilk yer, get me? But—" She looked up, and suddenly, had Nag Hong Fab known it, the arrogance, the clamorings, and the tragedy of her mixed blood was in the words that followed: "I gotta have a dose of freedom. I'm an American—I'm white—say!"—seeing the smile which he hid rapidly behind his fat hand—"yer needn't laugh. I *am* white, an' not a painted Chinese doll. No sittin' up an' mopin' for the retoin of my fat, yellow lord an' master in a stuffy, stinky, punky five-by-four cage for me! In other woids, I resolve for my little golden-haired self the freedom of asphalt an' electric lights, see? An' I'll play square—as long as you'll play square," she added under her breath.

"Sure," he said. "You are free. Why not? I am an American. Have a drink?" And they sealed the bargain in a tumbler of Chinese rice whisky, cut with Bourbon, and flavored with aniseed and powdered ginger.

The evening following the wedding husband and wife, instead of a honeymoon trip, went on an alcoholic spree amid the newly varnished splendors of their Pell Street flat. Side by side, in spite of the biting December cold, they leaned from the open window and brayed an intoxicated pæan at the Elevated structure which

pointed at the stars like a gigantic icicle stood on end, frozen, austere—desolate, for all its clank and rattle, amid the fragrant, warm reek of China which drifted from shutters and cellar-gratings.

Nag Hong Fah, seeing Yung Long crossing the street, thought with drunken sentimentality of Yung Long's sister whom he had divorced because she had borne him no children, and extended a boisterous invitation to come up.

"Come! Have a drink!" he hiccuped.

Yung Long stopped, looked, and refused courteously, but not before he had leveled a slow, appraising glance at the golden-haired Mei Hi, who was shouting by the side of her obese lord. Yung Long was not a bad-looking man, standing there in the flickering light of the street-lamp, the black shadows cutting the pale-yellow, silky sheen of his narrow, powerful face as clean as with a knife.

"Swell looker, that Chink!" commented Fanny Mei Hi as Yung Long walked away; and her husband, the liquor warming his heart into generosity, agreed:

"Sure! Swell looker! Lots of money! Let's have another drink!"

Arrived at the sixth tumbler, Nag Hong Fah, the poet in his soul released by alcohol, took his blushing bride upon his knee and improvised a neat Cantonese love-ditty; but when Fanny awakened the next morning with the sobering suspicion that she had tied herself for life to a drunkard, she found out that her suspicion was unfounded.

The whisky spree had only been an appropriate celebration in honor of the man-child on whom Nag Hong Fah had set his heart; and it was because of this unborn son and the unborn son's future that her husband rose from his tumbled couch, bland, fat, without headache or heartache, left the flat, and bargained for an hour with Yung Long, who was a wholesale grocer, with warehouses in Canton, Manila, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver, British Columbia.

Not a word was said about either Yung Quai or Fanny. The talk dealt entirely with canned bamboo sprouts and preserved

leeches, and pickled star-fruit, and brittle almond-cakes. It was only after the price had been decided upon and duly sealed with the right phrases and palm touching palm—after, though nothing in writing had passed, neither party could recede from the bargain without losing face—that Yung Long remarked, very casually:

"By the way, the terms are cash—spot cash," and he smiled.

For he knew that the restaurant proprietor was an audacious merchant who relied on long credits and future profits, and to whom in the past he had always granted ninety days' leeway without question or special agreement.

Nag Hong Fah smiled in his turn; a slow, thin, enigmatic smile.

"I brought the cash with me," he replied, pulling a wad of greenbacks from his pocket, and both gentlemen looked at each other with a great deal of mutual respect.

"Forty-seven dollars and thirty-three cents saved on the first business of my married life," Nag Hong Fah said to his assembled clan that night at the Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment. "Ah, I shall have a fine, large business to leave to the man-child which my wife shall bear me!"

And the man-child came—golden-haired, blue-eyed, yellow-skinned, and named Brian in honor of Fanny's apocryphal uncle who owned the Bowery saloon. For the christening Nag Hong Fah sent out special invitations—pink cards lettered with virulent magenta and bordered with green forget-me-nots and purple roses, with an advertisement of the Great Shanghai Chop Suey Palace on the reverse side. He also bestowed upon his wife a precious bracelet of cloudy white jade, earrings of green jade cunningly inlaid with blue feathers, a chest of carved Tibetan soapstone, a bottle of French perfume, a pound of Mandarin blossom tea for which he paid seventeen dollars wholesale, a set of red Chinese sables, and a new Caruso record for the victrola.

Fanny liked the last two best; chiefly the furs, which she wore through the whirling heat of an August day as soon as she

was strong enough to leave her couch, on an expedition to her native pavements. For she held fast to her proclaimed right that hers was the freedom of asphalt and electric light—not to mention the back parlor of her uncle's saloon, with its dingy, musty walls covered with advertisements of eminent Kentucky distilleries and the indelible traces of many generations of flies, with its gangrened tables, its battered cuspidors, its commingling atmosphere of poverty and sloth, of dust and stale beer, of cheese sandwiches, wet weeds, and cold cigars.

"Getta hell outa here!" she admonished a red-powdered bricklayer who came staggering across the threshold of the back parlor and was trying to encircle her waist with amatory intent. "I'm a respectable married woman—see?" And then to Miss Ryan, the side-kick of her former riotous spinster days, who was sitting at a corner table dipping her pretty little upturned nose into a foaming schooner: "Take my tip, Mamie, an' marry a Chink! That's the life, believe me!"

Mamie shrugged her shoulders.

"All right for you, Fan, I guess," she replied. "But not for me. Y'see—ye're mostly Chink yerself—"

"I ain't! I ain't! I'm white—wottya mean callin' me a Chink?" And then, seeing signs of contrition on her friend's face: "Never mind. Chinkie-Toodles is good enough for me. He treats me white, all right, all right!"

Nor was this an overstatement of the actual facts.

Nag Hong Fah was good to her. He was happy in the realization of his fatherhood, advertised every night by lusty cries which reverberated through the narrow, rickety Pell Street house to find an echo across the street in the liquor-store of the Chin Sor Company, where the members of his clan predicted a shining future for father and son.

The former was prospering. The responsibilities of fatherhood had brought an added zest and tang to his keen, bartering Mongol brain. Where before he had squeezed the dollar, he was now squeezing the cent. He had many a hard tussle with

the rich Yung Long over the price of tea and rice and other staples, and never did either one of them mention the name of Yung Quai, nor that of the woman who had supplanted Yung Quai in the restaurant-keeper's affections.

Fanny was honest. She traveled the straight and narrow, as she put it to herself. "Nor ain't it any strain on my feet," she confided to Miss Ryan. For she was happy and contented. Life, after all, had been good to her, had brought her prosperity and satisfaction at the hands of a fat Chinaman, at the end of her fantastic, twisted, unclean youth; and there were moments when, in spite of herself, she felt herself drawn into the surge of that Mongol race which had given her nine-tenths of her blood—a fact which formerly she had been in the habit of denying vigorously.

She laughed her happiness through the spiced, warm mazes of Chinatown, her first-born cuddled to her breast, ready to be friends with everybody.

It was thus that Yung Long would see her walking down Pell Street as he sat in the carved window-seat of his store, smoking his crimson-tasseled pipe, a wandering ray of sun dancing through the window, breaking into prismatic colors, and wreathing his pale, serene face with opal vapors.

He never failed to wave his hand in courtly greeting.

She never failed to return the civility.

Some swell looker, that Chink. But—Gawd!—she was square, all right, all right!

A year later, after Nag Hong Fah, in expectation of the happy event, had acquired an option on a restaurant farther up-town, so that the second son might not be slighted in favor of Brian, who was to inherit the Great Shanghai Chop Suey Palace, Fanny sent another little cross-breed into the reek and riot of the Pell Street world. But when Nag Hong Fah came home that night, the nurse told him that the second-born was a girl—something to be entered on the debit, not the credit, side of the family ledger.

It was then that a change came into the marital relations of Mr. and Mrs. Nag Hong Fah.

Not that the former disliked the baby daughter, called Fanny, after the mother. Far from it. He loved her with a sort of slow, passive love, and he could be seen on an afternoon rocking the wee bundle in his stout arms and whispering to her crooning Cantonese fairy-lilts: all about the god of small children whose face is a candied plum, so that the babes like to hug and kiss him and, of course, lick his face with their little pink tongues.

But this time there was no christening, no gorgeous magenta-lettered invitations sent to the chosen, no happy prophesies about the future.

This time there were no precious presents of green jade and white jade heaped on the couch of the young mother.

She noticed it. But she did not complain. She said to herself that her husband's new enterprise was swallowing all his cash; and one night she asked him how the new restaurant was progressing.

"What new restaurant?" he asked blandly.

"The one up-town, Toodles—for the baby—"

Nag Hong Fah laughed carelessly.

"Oh—I gave up that option. Didn't lose much."

Fanny sat up straight, clutching little Fanny to her.

"You—you gave it up?" she asked. "Wottya mean—gave it up?"

Then, suddenly inspired by some whisper of suspicion, her voice leaping up extraordinarily strong: "You mean you gave it up—because—because little Fanny is—a goil?"

He agreed with a smiling nod.

"To be sure! A girl is fit only to bear children and clean the household pots."

He said it without any brutality, without any conscious male superiority; simply as a statement of fact. A melancholy fact, doubtless. But a fact, unchangeable, stony.

"But—but—" Fanny's gutter flow of words floundered in the eddy of her amazement, her hurt pride and vanity. "I'm a woman myself—an' I—"

"Assuredly you are a woman and you have done your duty. You have borne me a son. Perhaps, if the omens be favorable

you will bear me yet another. But this—this girl—" He dismissed little Fanny with a wave of his pudgy, dimpled hand as a regrettable accident, and continued, soothingly: "She will be taken care of. Already I have written to friends of our clan in San Francisco to arrange for a suitable disposal when the baby has reached the right age." He said it in his mellow, precise English. He had learned it at a night-school, where he had been the pride and honor of his class.

Fanny had risen. She left her couch. With a swish-swish of knitted bed-slippers she loomed up on the ring of faint light shed by the swinging petroleum-lamp in the center of the room. She approached her husband, the baby held close to her heart with her left hand, her right hand aimed at Nag Hong Fah's solid chest like a pistol. Her deep-set, violet-blue eyes seemed to pierce through him.

But the Chinese blood in her veins—shrewd, patient—scotched the violence of her American passion, but American sense of loudly clamoring for right and justice and fairness. She controlled herself. The accusing hand relaxed and fell gently on the man's shoulder. She was fighting for her daughter, fighting for the drop of white blood in her veins, and it would not do to lose her temper.

"Looka here, Chinkie-Toodles," she said. "You call yerself a Christian, don't yer? A Christian an' an American. Well, have a heart. An' some sense! This ain't China, Toodles. Lil Fanny ain't goin' to be weighed an' sold to some rich brother Chink at so many seeds per pound. Not much! She's gonna be eddycated. She's gonna have her chance, see? She's gonna be independent of the male beast an' the sorta life wot the male beast likes to hand to a skoit. Believe me, Toodles, I know what I'm talkin' about!"

But he shook his stubborn head. "All has been settled," he replied. "Most satisfactorily settled!"

He turned to go. But she rushed up to him. She clutched his sleeve.

"Yer—yer don't meant it? Yer can't meant it!" she stammered.

"I do, fool!" He made a slight, weary

gesture as if brushing away the incomprehensible. "You are a woman—you do not understand—"

"Don't I, though!"

She spoke through her teeth. Her words clicked and broke like dropping icicles. Swiftly her passion turned into stone, and as swiftly back again, leaping out in a great, spattering stream of abuse.

"Yer damned, yellow, stinkin' Chink! Yer—yer— Wottya mean—makin' me bear children—yer own children—an' then —" Little Fanny was beginning to howl lustily and she covered her face with kisses. "Say, kiddie, it's a helluva dad you've drawn! A helluva dad! Look at him—standin' there! Greasy an' yellow an'— Say—he's willin' to sell yer into slavery to some other beast of a Chink! Say—"

"You are a—ah—a Chink yourself, fool!"

"I ain't! I'm white—an' square—an' decent—an'—"

"Ah!"

He lit a cigarette and smiled placidly, and suddenly she knew that it would be impossible to argue, to plead with him. Might as well plead with some sardonic, deaf immensity, without nerves, without heart. And then, womanlike, the greater wrong disappeared in the lesser.

"Ye're right. I'm part Chink myself—an' damned sorry for myself because of it! An' that's why I know why yer gave me no presents when lil Fanny was born. Because she's a girl! As if that was my fault, yer fat, sneerin' slob, yer! Yah! That's why yer gave me no presents—I know! I know what it means when a Chink don't give no presents to his wife when she gives both to a child! Make me lose face—that's wottya call it, ain't it? An' I thought fer a while yer was savin' up the ducats to give lil Fanny a start in life!

"Well, yer got another guess comin'! Yer gonna do wot I tell yer, see? Yer gonna open up that there new restaurant up-town, an' yer gonna give me presents! A bracelet, that's what I want! None o' yer measly Chink jade, either; but the real thing, get me? Gold an' diamonds, see?" and she was still talking as he, unmoved, silent, smiling, left the room and went down

the creaking stairs to find solace in the spiced cups of the Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment.

She rushed up to the window and threw it wide. She leaned far out, her hair framing her face like a glorious, disordered aureole, her loose robe slipping from her gleaming shoulders, her violet eyes blazing fire and hatred.

She shouted at his fat, receding back:

"A bracelet, that's what I want! That's what I'm gonna get, see? Gold an' diamonds! Gold an' diamonds, yer yellow pig, yer!"

It was at that moment that Yung Long passed her house. He heard, looked up, and greeted her courteously, as was his wont. But this time he did not go straight on his way. He looked at her for several seconds, taking in the soft lines of her neck and shoulders, the small, pale oval of her face with the crimson of her broad, generous mouth, the white flash of her small, even teeth, and the blue, somber orbit of her eyes. With the light of the lamp shining in back, a breeze rushing in front past the open window, the wide sleeves of her dressing-gown fluttered like immense, rosy butterfly wings.

Instinctively she returned his gaze. Instinctively, straight through her rage and heartache, the old thought came to her mind:

Swell looker—that Chink!

And then, without realizing what she was doing, her lips had formed the thought into words:

"Swell looker!"

She said it in a headlong and vehement whisper that drifted down, through the whirling reek of Pell Street—sharp, sibilant, like a message.

Yung Long smiled, raised his neat bowler hat, and went on his way.

Night after night Fanny returned to the attack, cajoling, caressing, threatening, cursing.

"Listen here, Chinkie-Toodles—"

But she might as well have tried to argue with the sphinx for all the impression she made on her eternally smiling lord. He would drop his amorphous body into a

comfortable rocker, moving it up and down with the tips of his felt-slipped feet, a cigarette hanging loosely from the right corner of his coarse, sagging lips, a cup of lukewarm rice whisky convenient to his elbow, and watch her as he might the gyrations of an exotic beetle whose wings had been burned off. She amused him. But after a while continuous repetition palled the amusement into monotony, and, correctly Chinese, he decided to make a formal complaint to Brian O'Neill, the Bowery saloon-keeper, who called himself her uncle.

Life, to that prodigal of Erin, was a rather sunny arrangement of small conveniences and small, pleasant vices. He laughed in his throat and called his "nephew" a damned, sentimental fool.

"Beat her up!" was his calm, matter-of-fact advice. "Give her a good old hiding, an' she'll feed outa yer hand, me lad!"

"I have—ah—your official permission, as head of her family?"

"Sure. Wait. I'll lend ye me blackthorn. She knows the taste of it."

Nag Hong Fah took both advice and blackthorn. That night he gave Fanny a severe beating and repeated the performance every night for a week until she subsided.

Once more she became the model wife, and happiness returned to the stout bosom of her husband. Even Miss Rutter, the social settlement investigator, commented upon it. "Real love is a shelter of unexpugnable peace," she said when she saw the Nag Hong Fah family walking down Pell Street, little Brian toddling on ahead, the baby cuddled in her mother's arms.

Generously Nag Hong Fah overlooked his wife's petty womanish vanities; and when she came home one afternoon, flushed, excited, exhibiting a shimmering bracelet that was encircling her wrist, "just imitation gold an' diamonds, Chinkie-Toodles!" she explained. "Bought it outa my savings—thought yer wouldn't mind, see? Thought it wouldn't hurt yer none if them Chinks hereabouts thinks it was the real dope an' yer gave it to me"—he smiled and took her upon his knee as of old.

"Yes, yes," he said, his pudgy hand

fondling the intense golden gleam of her tresses. "It is all right. Perhaps—if you bear me another son—I shall give you a real bracelet, real gold, real diamonds. Meanwhile you may wear this bauble."

As before she hugged jealously her proclaimed freedom of asphalt and electric lights. Nor did he raise the slightest objections. He had agreed to it at the time of their marriage and, being a righteous man, he kept to his part of the bargain with serene punctiliousness.

Brian Neill, whom he chanced to meet one afternoon in Señora Garcia's second-hand emporium, told him it was all right.

"That beatin' ye gave her didn't do her any harm, me beloved nephew," he said. "She's square. God help the lad who tries to pass a bit o' blarney to her." He chuckled in remembrance of a Finnish sailor who had beaten a sudden and undignified retreat from the back parlor into the saloon, with a ragged scratch crimsoning his face and bitter words about the female of the species crowding his lips. "Faith, she's square! Sits there with her little glass o' gin an' her auld chum, Mamie Ryan—an' them two chews the rag by the hour—talkin' about frocks and frills, I doubt not—"

Of course, once in a while she would return home a little the worse for liquor. But Nag Hong Fah, being a Chinaman, would mantle such small shortcomings with the wide charity of his personal laxity.

"Better a drunken wife who cooks well and washes the children and keeps her tongue between her teeth, than a sober wife who reeks with virtue and breaks the household pots," he said to Nag Hop Fat, the soothsayer. "Better an honorable pig than a cracked rose bottle."

"Indeed! Better a fleet mule than a hamstrung horse," the other wound up the pleasant round of Oriental metaphors, and he reenforced his opinion with a chosen and appropriate quotation from the "Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King."

When late one night that winter a high wind booming from the north and washing the snow-dusted Pell Street houses with its cutting blast, Fanny came home with a jag,

a chill, and a hacking cough, and went down with pneumonia seven hours later, Nag Hong Fah was genuinely sorry. He turned the management of his restaurant over to his brother, Nag Sen Yat, and sat by his wife's bed, whispering words of encouragement, bathing her feverish forehead, changing her sheets, administering medicine, doing everything with fingers as soft and deft as a woman's.

Even after the doctor had told him three nights later that the case was hopeless and that Fanny would die—even after, as a man of constructive and practical brain, he had excused himself for a few minutes and had sat down in the back room to write a line to Yung Quai, his divorced wife in San Francisco, bidding her hold herself in readiness and including a hundred dollars for transportation—he continued to treat Fanny Mei Hi with the utmost gentleness and patience.

Tossing on her hot pillows, she could hear him in the long watches of the night breathing faintly, clearing his throat cautiously so as not to disturb her; and on Monday morning—he had lifted her up and was holding her close to help her resist the frightful, hacking cough that was shaking her wasted frame—he told her that he had reconsidered about little Fanny.

"You are going to die," he said placidly, in a way apologetically, "and it is fitting that your daughter should make proper obeisance to your departed spirit. A child's devotion is best stimulated by gratitude. And little Fanny shall be grateful to you. For she will go to a good American school and, to pay for it, I shall sell your possessions after you are dead. The white jade bracelet, the earrings of green jade, the red sables—they will bring over four thousand dollars. Even this little bauble"—he slipped the glittering bracelet from her thin wrist—"this, too, will bring a few dollars. Ten, perhaps twelve; I know a dealer of such trifles in Mott Street who—"

"Say!"

Her voice cut in, raucous, challenging. She had wriggled out of his arms. An opaque glaze had come over her violet-blue eyes. Her whole body trembled. But she pulled herself on her elbows with a terrible,

straining effort, refusing the support of his ready hands.

"Say! How much did yer say this here bracelet's worth?"

He smiled gently. He did not want to hurt her woman's vanity. So he increased his first appraisal.

"Twenty dollars," he suggested. "Perhaps twenty-one. Do not worry. It shall be sold to the best advantage—for your little daughter—"

And then, quite suddenly, Fanny burst into laughter—gurgling laughter that shook her body, choked her throat, and leaped out in a stream of blood from her tortured lungs.

"Twenty dollars!" she cried. "Twenty-one! Say, you poor cheese, that bracelet alone 'll pay for lil Fanny's eddycation. It's worth thrée thousand! It's real, real—gold an' diamonds! Gold an' diamonds! Yung Long gave it to me, yer poor fool!" and she fell back and died, a smile upon her face, which made her look like a sleeping child, wistful and perverse.

A day after his wife's funeral Nag Hong Fah, having sent a ceremonious letter, called on Yung Long in the latter's store. In the motley, twisted annals of Pell Street the meeting, in the course of time, has assumed the character of something epic, something Homeric, something almost religious. It is mentioned with pride by both the Nag and the Yung clans; the tale of it has drifted to the Pacific Coast; and even in far China wise men speak of it with a hush of reverence as they drift down the river on their painted house-boats in peach-blossom time.

Yung Long received his caller at the open door of his shop.

"Deign to enter first," he said bowing.

Nag Hong Fah bowed still lower.

"How could I dare to?" he retorted, quoting a line from the "Book of Ceremonies and Exterior Demonstrations," which proved that the manner is the heart's inner feeling.

"Please deign to enter first," Yung Long emphasized, and again the other gave the correct reply: "How should I dare?"

Then, after a final request, still protesting, he entered as he was bidden. The grocer followed, walked to the east side of the store and indicated the west side to his visitor as Chinese courtesy demands.

"Deign to choose your mat," he went on and, after several coy refusals, Nag Hong Fah obeyed again, sat down, and smiled gently at his host.

"A pipe?" suggested the latter.

"Thanks! A simple pipe of bamboo, please, with a plain bamboo mouthpiece and no ornaments!"

"No, no!" protested Yung Long. "You will smoke a precious pipe of jade with a carved amber mouthpiece and crimson tassels!"

He clapped his hands, whereupon one of his young cousins entered with a tray of nacre, supporting an opium-lamp, pipes and needles and bowls, and horn and ivory boxes neatly arranged. A minute later the brown opium cube was sizzling over the open flame, the jade pipe was filled and passed to Nag Hong Fah, who inhaled the gray, acrid smoke with all the strength of his lungs, then returned the pipe to the boy, who refilled it and passed it to Yung Long.

For a while the two men smoked in silence—men of Pell Street, men of lowly trade, yet men at whose back three thousand years of unbroken racial history, racial pride, racial achievements and racial calm, were sitting in a solemn, graven row—thus dignified men.

Yung Long was caressing his cheek with his right hand. The dying, crimson sunlight danced and glittered on his well-polished finger-nails.

Finally he broke the silence.

"Your wife is dead," he said with a little mournful cadence at the end of the sentence.

"Yes." Nag Hong Fah inclined his head sadly; and after a short pause: "My friend, it is indeed reasonable to think that young men are fools, their brains hot and crimson with the blinding mists of passion, while wisdom and calm are the splendid attributes of older men—"

"Such as—you and I?"

"Indeed!" decisively.

Yung Long raised himself on his elbows.

His oblique eyes flashed a scrutinizing look and the other winked a slow wink and remarked casually that a wise and old man must first peer into the nature of things, then widen his knowledge, then harden his will, then control the impulses of his heart, then entirely correct himself—then establish good order in his family.

"Truly spoken," agreed Yung Long. "Truly spoken, O wise and older brother! A family! A family needs the strength of a man and the soft obedience of a woman."

"Mine is dead," sighed Nag Hong Fah. "My household is upset. My children cry."

Yung Long slipped a little fan from his wide silken sleeves and opened it slowly.

"I have a sister," he said gently, "Yung Quai, a childless woman who once was your wife, O wise and older brother."

"A most honorable woman!" Nag Hong Fah shut his eyes and went on: "I wrote to her five days ago, sending her money for her railway fare to New York."

"Ah!" softly breathed the grocer; and there followed another silence.

Yung Long's young cousin was kneading, against the pipe, the dark opium cubes which the flame gradually changed into gold and amber.

"Please smoke," advised the grocer.

Nag Hong Fah had shut his eyes completely, and his fat face, yellow as old parchment, seemed to have grown indifferent, dull, almost sleepy.

Presently he spoke:

"Your honorable sister, Yung Quai, will make a most excellent mother for the children of my late wife."

"Indeed."

There was another silence, again broken by Nag Hong Fah. His voice held a great calmness, a gentle singsong, a bronze quality which was like the soft rubbing of an ancient temple gong, green with the patina of the swinging centuries.

"My friend," he said, "there is the matter of a shimmering bracelet given by you to my late wife—"

Yung Long looked up quickly; then down again as he saw the peaceful expression on the other's bland features and heard him continue:

"For a while I misunderstood. My heart was blinded. My soul was seared with rage. I—I am ashamed to own up to it—I harbored harsh feelings against you. Then I considered that you were the older brother of Yung Quai and a most honorable man. I considered that in giving the bracelet to my wife you doubtless meant to show your appreciation for me, your friend, her husband. Am I not right?"

Yung Long had filled his lungs with another bowlful of opium smoke. He was leaning back, both shoulders on the mat so as the better to dilate his chest and to keep his lungs filled all the longer with the fumes of the kindly, philosophic drug.

"Yes," he replied after a minute or two. "Your indulgent lips have pronounced words full of harmony and reason. Only—there is yet another trifling matter."

"Name it. It shall be honorably solved."

Yung Long sat up and fanned himself slowly.

"At the time when I arranged a meeting with the mother of your children," he said, "so as to speak to her of my respectful friendship for you and to bestow upon her a shimmering bracelet in proof of it, I was

afraid of the wagging, leaky tongues of Pell Street. I was afraid of scandal and gossip. I therefore met your wife in the back room of Señora García's store, on the Bowery. Since then I have come to the conclusion that perhaps I acted foolishly. For the foreign woman may have misinterpreted my motives. She may talk, thus causing you as well as me to lose face, and besmirching the departed spirit of your wife. What sayeth the 'Li-Ki'? 'What is whispered in the private apartments must not be shouted outside.' Do you not think that this foreign woman should—ah—"

Nag Hong Fah smiled affectionately upon the other.

"You have spoken true words, O wise and older brother," he said rising. "It is necessary for your and my honor, as well as for the honor of my wife's departed spirit, that the foreign woman should not wag her tongue. I shall see to it to-night." He waved a fat, deprecating hand. "Yes—yes. I shall see to it. It is a simple act of family piety—but otherwise without much importance."

And he bowed, left the store, and returned to his house to get his lean knife.



SONG OF AN AVIATOR

BY GRACE G. BOSTWICK

I RIDE on the crest of the wind,
 Volplaning is sport for the gods;
 The eagle I leave far behind
 As I dexterously handle the rods.
 Below are the robes that conceal
 The barely-clad beauties of earth;
 The cities like gems softly steal
 In and out of her shimmering girth.

The waters aglow in the sun
 Are ribbons of silvery sheen;
 The pearly-topped ranges but one
 Of the necklaces worn by the queen,
 She smiles like a Circe to woo
 Me away from my love of the sky;
 For my lady, the earth, can but rue
 That never with man may she fly.

Covered Up

by Maxwell Smith

Author of "Both Ends," "Four Kings," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BOUND FOR NOWHERE.

IT is one thing to make up your mind—the thought made John Madison pause and quite something else to carry out the determination. His big figure almost filled the side door to the bank, of which he was vice-president. It was a means of entry seldom used, and then only by the officials who alone had keys to it.

Regret flashed over his broad features as he hesitated. His likable face turned backward an instant and he half-pushed the door open. He looked down at the Gladstone bag in his hand and came back to his decision. Firmly he stepped into the alleyway at the side of the building. The clang of the heavy little postern resounded.

Before passing into the street he halted again. It was two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. He was thinking of those he would meet, on this, the main street of the little town.

Then he stepped briskly out. Some one, of course, would notice him, and later they would remember the bag he carried. It would look like a getaway, all right.

That was what hurt. John Madison making a getaway! He did not like that.

He tried as much as possible to avoid attention on the way to the railroad station. There was a train at two-eighteen. If he made that he would be in New York in half an hour and really under way.

Madison wasn't nervous. He knew there could be no alarm yet a while. But he would rather get away without meeting any of his friends.

Whimsically he looked over the town he

had grown to love. He marked the buildings that had sprung up; passed one of the play-spots that he had been instrumental in creating. As he had come out of nowhere so was he going into nowhere. That is, if South America could be so characterized. He knew South America and thought it could.

His face hardened when he thought of the two men he had left there in the bank. How still they had been when he went out. How deathlike the place in which he was burying the new life that had come to him after a long struggle.

If one of them had only moved. That would have helped. Just the slightest motion. But, no—it had been like walking out of a tomb!

A little start—that was all he wanted. Just time enough to get going. For a week he had been figuring on his course. Now he was taking it. That afternoon he would sail. And all he asked was a little time.

Five o'clock and he would be heading down the bay. Possibly—probably they would be waiting to take him at Porto Rico. He realized that he would be traced. That would not be hard.

If they were prepared to seize him at Porto Rico it would mean, however, that the trail must be taken up within four days. And he smiled quietly. Whether it was or was not, he would not be there when they boarded the ship in the West Indies.

Four years of peace and rest he had had. It had been an experiment, but he had liked it. Out of the depths of South America he had come with money—a modest fortune made in rubber. He could go back there and lose himself easily enough. There

were folks, few indeed, but still there were men away in there who would be glad to see him.

The repose of the town in the mid-afternoon sun struck a chord of sorrow. He did not want to leave. He had enjoyed playing at being a banker, for that was what it amounted to, his interest in the institution, the door of which he had just closed behind him forever.

Only by a whim had he tarried in Crosston on his return from the wilds. He had no home ties; his native village had forgotten him and he had forgotten it. So he had stayed in Crosston. Its quiet was what had appealed mostly to him, the gentle serenity with which it went about its own little business.

Old Walter Fleming, president of the Commercial Bank, had been among the first to be friendly to Madison. Every one in Crosston had been that, but from the start he had taken to old Fleming. When he heard that there was a goodly block of stock in the Commercial for sale, to settle an estate, Madison thought it would be fun to sit in as a banker. He had been most everything else in his thirty years, for he was only a shaver when his mother died and eighteen when his father followed her.

Several people nodded as he went down the street. One or two who passed close by indicated the bag and murmured the inane "Going away?" Whereat he nodded back and tried to smile. His eyes grew just a little tired and wistful as he contemplated that, as he desired, it would look like a getaway in the light that would come later. John Madison running away!

Among those he met was one who caused him the greatest pang of all—a girl who recently had found considerable part in his thoughts. She was Madeline Ruth, the niece of a director of the bank, and herself the holder of a few shares of stock.

Madeline Ruth had appealed to him in three ways: she was intelligent; she was handsome in face and figure, and she had character to back up these other attributes. She slowed her step when she saw Madison approaching. He had hardly left the bank when they met. A trace of wonder came over her as she eyed the bag he carried.

"I won't ask whether you are going away," she laughed oddly, "but—it looks like a long trip."

"Perhaps." Madison avoided a direct answer. "I—"

The somber expression that enveloped the rounded features of the girl made him pause. Suppose her uncle had talked? As a director of the bank he might have had from Fleming, the president, some inkling of the situation as it had stood until a few minutes ago.

— "Yes," he added, "I'm going—quite a distance."

The shadow in her eyes became accentuated. She fingered the big knitting bag that was hooped over her arm.

"For long?" she inquired seriously.

Madison hadn't expected the heartache to start so soon. With a swirl he discovered to what an extent this girl had been in his mind. If it hadn't been for—things, he might have—

"Probably for a long time," he said gravely. Lines furrowed from the ends of his mouth. He looked away from the steady gaze that Madeline bent upon him. She was visibly perplexed—and it was due to the fact her uncle *had* dropped a word about conditions at the Commercial Bank.

"You've just come—from the bank?" Her words faltered. "Were you in—to say good-by because you are going away—for a long time?"

The restraint in their conversation was very marked. Both appeared fearful of saying too much—and they knew it. Madison cut the meeting short. He looked at his watch.

"Forgive me, Miss Ruth," he said woodenly. "I want—I have to get the two-eighteen."

The girl murmured: "Of course," but she lingered over the parting. He shifted the Gladstone to his other hand, torn between a desire to remain talking with Madeline Ruth and the necessity of being off. Despair and relief mingled in his brain when, finally, after a silence, she said good-by. The manner in which she spoke the simple words struck him as carrying a deeper meaning. He was staring so intently at her that he did not notice her

outstretched hand. Then he grasped it with such strength that it made her wince.

"Good-by, Madeline Ruth." There was a catch in his voice. "I—must hurry."

Bewildered and happy over the feeling which he had put into the two words of her name, she stood looking after him. A block away he turned and she was still watching. Swearing steadily to himself, he hastened his steps and just made the train.

There he met Fallon, one of the directors of the Crosston Chamber of Commerce and an examiner for the State Bank Department. Madison had expected that too—to meet some one who knew him on the train.

"Going far?" asked Fallon when they had settled in the smoker.

Madison passed his cigar-case and lit one before he replied. His gaze was on the rawhide bag that had battered around with him for years. The long, thin shaving gouged out of it there—was where he had swung it to ward off a knife-thrust in Rio de Janeiro. The furrows on that corner showed where a pack-mule had tested his teeth one night in camp on the way in from a far plantation. The buckle that did not match the others had been put on by a South American cobbler after Madison had saved the bag from bandits who had looted his tent. Yes; he and the bag knew strange places where he again could go and feel at home.

His long silence made Fallon smile.

"Why the trance?" he asked.

Madison looked up.

"What did you ask before that? Oh, yes," he answered vaguely, "I'm going—for a trip."

Fallon would remember his preoccupation, he mused. Queer how people think of all these little things when they have to do with a man-hunt. Fallon, he supposed, would hurry when the time came to tell how he had met Madison on the train—and how abstracted Madison had been.

"That trolley proposition is coming before the chamber next Thursday," said Fallon. "Will you be back in time for the hearing?"

The glowing end of the cigar leered at Madison. Fallon was making it harder to leave Crosston. Dammit, he did like the

town! For a moment he almost forgot that he was bolting. But it came back to him with a rush as his foot encountered his bag.

Would he be back in time to take part in this demand for a new car-line into Crosston? The ash gathering on his cigar and slowly creeping over the fire imbued the leer with a sly and knowing wink, at which Madison's eyes, not happily, grinned back. Would he be back?

"Perhaps." He aroused himself from reflection and answered Fallon. "I'm not sure."

When Fallon insisted, the vice-president of the Commercial Bank set his teeth into the cigar and rolled it from one side of his mouth to the other. They liked him, Fallon said. Soon they would dislike him; and every one that had seen him would help put the police on his track.

"I enjoyed myself the years I rambled around the world," he was talking to himself more than to Fallon, "but I've enjoyed myself far more during my four years in Crosston. I'd hate to leave it."

"Leave Crosston—you!" exclaimed Fallon. He laughed again. "Try it some day, Madison; just try it. You'll find the railroad torn up and that the highways have vanished. Why, man"—he lowered his voice—"you're going to be the next mayor. Sh! It won't do you a bit of good to decline. You can't do it. And you'll get the most solid vote. Crosston's thirty thousand voters ever registered."

When the chase began they would not want to make him mayor. They would thank Heaven that they had not had the chance! It was Madison's turn to laugh. Planning to give a man their highest gift, when he was fleeing and praying that he would have a start on the police, was too ludicrous.

"Think it a joke?" Fallon turned with twinkling eyes.

"I do," said Madison. "An—odd sort of joke."

"Then wait and see. This is the middle of September—you've got about six weeks left before you start running Crosston."

They were hauling into Grand Central.

"Start from here or from the Pennsylvania?"

"Eh?" Madison started at the question. "Oh—from down-town!"

Together they walked out on Forty-Second Street.

"So-long!" waved Fallon. "I'm going up-town. Have a good time and try to get back by Thursday."

"I'll try," responded Madison.

He stood looking after Fallon. It would be but human nature for this man to relate their conversation in detail when the cry was raised. How many times he would have to recount that brief journey from Crosston to New York! He would be the man who last talked to the fugitive.

Madison laughed aloud so that passers-by looked at him curiously. Still openly under a veneer of amusement that would not be downed, he got into a taxi and ordered it to Pier Q, North River.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE WATCHMAN FOUND.

AT five o'clock in the afternoon, three hours after he stepped out of the Commercial Bank in Crosston, John Madison was slipping down the North River aboard the steamship Monterey. She was bound for the River Plata *via* Porto Rico and Pernambuco. Down the bay the steamer was stopped by a naval patrol boat. There was a report of submarines near-by, off Long Island, and the U-boat net was closed in the Narrows, barring the port to all shipping.

At eight o'clock the night watchman, Billings, went to take up his duties at the bank in Crosston. Usually King, the man he relieved on a Saturday evening, met him at the door. This night he did not.

The fact there was no light showing in the bank struck Billings as peculiar when he approached. He rang the bell several times without result, and his uneasiness increased. There should have been some indication of King's presence. Ordinarily he set several lights burning in the front of the building as soon as dusk began to fall.

Before he put his hand to the wicket set in the huge wrought-iron gate, Billings felt

that something was wrong. He hung back when the little door yielded to his touch. That was suspicious—the door open and King not there beside it.

Billings thought of calling for help before he entered the building. He stood listening inside the big gate. There was another door to his left which he had to pass through before he was in the bank proper. He drew his revolver and stepped quietly inside. This door too was unlocked.

Peering into the murk of the banking house he called softly for King. His voice echoed queerly in the stillness. He called again, but no one answered.

Intently Billings stood there waiting for a creak that might indicate some presence. Finally he stepped inside, his pistol ready for action.

Moving across to where he knew the electric switches were located he stumbled over something bulky. It was a few feet from where a grilled gate led behind the counter. Stooping quickly he ran his hands over the obstruction. It was a body—the body of King!

Billings's fingers moved upward to the face. He started to his feet with an exclamation. His hand had come away sticky.

Then he ran for the switch without waiting for further investigation. It was too grisly work in the dark.

The first lights into which he threw the current were several clusters in the front of the bank, outside the counters. In their brilliance he stood aghast.

King's head was cloven half-way down through his face. Beside him lay a long brass ruler with which the blow had been struck.

In semipanic Billings telephoned for the police. At the inner door he stood awaiting their arrival. Back there in the vault, he supposed, something had happened, but that was nothing compared to the foul work that lay there on the floor within his view. The vault could wait.

Chief of Police Rainor and two detectives arrived within a few minutes. Crosston boasted of its lack of crime. But here was a blot on the record. A murdered bank watchman presupposed a bank robbery. And right in the heart of the town.

While they stood over the body Billings told rapidly of finding the doors open and the place in darkness. The chief picked up the blood-stained ruler by inserting a slip of paper under it to preserve whatever finger-marks it might bear.

It was evident that the watchman had been struck with terrific force and from behind. The gash in his head was deeper at the back.

"Bah!" snorted the chief. "This looks like a regular job. Let's go see what else has happened."

Billings led the way to the vault in the rear. The door stood wide open. Two small safes inside it also had been ransacked, but their combination locks were intact.

"How'd you suppose they got into the vault without opening it?" said the chief querulously.

"Sometimes Mr. Fleming is here Saturday afternoons," suggested Billings, and tailed off with horror on his face.

"Have you called him?" snapped Rainor.

"No—no." Billings's eyes were popping.

"Then why didn't you?" The chief turned to one of his men: "Go phone Walter Fleming."

"But, chief"—Billings put a trembling hand on the officer's arm—"maybe—maybe he was here."

Chief Rainor looked at the watchman under drawn brows.

"What the devil are you driving at?"

"The vault is open without the lock being broken," persisted Billings. "Mr. Fleming sometimes comes here on Saturday. Don't you see—"

"By God, you may be right!" the chief exploded. "Come on!"

The police officer knew which was the president's office. The door stood an inch or two ajar.

Precipitately Rainor and his detectives, trailed by the watchman, burst in. With a gasp they came up, all standing.

Walter Fleming, president of the Commercial Bank, lay sprawled in a chair before his desk. Across the top of his head was a fearful wound. He also had been slashed with the brass ruler.

"Whew!" whistled the chief. "This looks like—"

The murdered man's right arm was hanging to the floor. In the hand was a piece of paper. The chief stepped forward and found it was a check.

From the cold fingers he extracted the slip. It was drawn on the Empire Bank of New York, and made out for one hundred thousand dollars, payable to the Commercial Bank of Crosston. The signature was John Madison.

"Phone Madison to get here right away," ordered the chief. "And get Fleming's son-in-law, Cowles. Tell them what has happened and make them hurry."

Hugh Cowles, treasurer of the bank, lived a mile away on the outskirts of the town. Madison's apartment was only a few blocks away. He lived alone except for a valet.

The detective who called from the bank was told Cowles had gone motoring. Mrs. Cowles was there—would she do? No, he said, but Mr. Cowles should call Chief of Police Rainor as soon as he got back. The sleuth did not think it wise to break the news of her father's murder to Mrs. Cowles over the telephone.

As he reported to the chief, the other detective, who had been detailed to phone Madison, reported that he could get no answer from his apartment.

"Go there and hunt him up, then," ordered the chief. "And get him in touch with me quick."

From the way in which Walter Fleming's chair was turned toward another that stood at the side of his desk, the chief judged that he had been talking with some one when the brass ruler crashed into his skull. That put a new kink in the case. If he had been talking to somebody in his bank on a Saturday afternoon, after business hours, it must have been some one known to him. Here was something to suggest that a friend, or, at least, an acquaintance, was implicated.

The chief sent after the cashier and instructed headquarters to get out an alarm, though he felt that was a useless enough proceeding, for he had not the slightest idea what sort of man or men he was seeking.

He wished Cowles or Madison or the cashier would hurry up. They would be able to tell what was missing from the vault. It was apparent that there had been robbery, but he wanted to know how much was gone.

Discovery of Fleming dead, to a certain extent, cleared up the problem of the open vault. Billings had pointed out that the president sometimes worked there on Saturday afternoon. At any rate, the robbery was a secondary question in the face of the double murder.

White-faced and fearful, Emery, the cashier, arrived shortly with a detective.

"Mr. Fleming was here when I left, about one o'clock," he quavered. "He said—he said to leave the vault and the safes inside open because he had some work to do."

"Any one else here?" questioned the chief.

Emery shook his head.

"Did he expect anybody?"

"I don't know."

"Get into the vault then and see if you can tell us what is gone."

The cashier stopped, gazing at the papers scattered about the strong room. Especially did he stare at one of the small safes, the compartments of which had been swept bare.

"Get to work," said the chief testily.

"We want a line on this. Go to work and tell us what they took."

If possible the cashier's face grew more ashen. He stuttered and pointed to the little safe.

"Say it," snapped Rainor. "I can't read signs."

"There was nearly two hundred thousand dollars in currency in that," Emery finally squeezed out.

Chief Rainor yanked off his uniform cap and swept his fingers through his thinning hair. Here *was* a job.

"Two hundred thousand," he repeated. "What a haul!"

Emery was pawing among the papers that littered the floor. His eyes were dazed as he looked up at the policeman.

"And in the other safe," he said, "was a couple of hundred thousand in securities."

Hope shone in the chief's face.

"We can trace them!" he exclaimed.

The cashier doused the hope.

"No; they were negotiable," he remarked dully. "The non-negotiable ones—about half of the lot—are still here. You know, those that could not be sold without attracting attention are here. They were passed up."

"Then," the chief grasped at the chance, "it was some one who knew what was what that did this?"

"It must have been," replied Emery, "somebody who knew all about the place."

"I thought of that," said Rainor. "Cowles or Madison may know if Mr. Fleming was to have a visitor this afternoon. Why don't they hurry?"

A couple of hours passed before they got a line on either of the bank officials. The chief was still on the premises, but the bodies of Walter Fleming and the watchman had been removed by the coroner, when a detective brought word that Madison had left his apartment about noon with a grip, stating he probably would not be back for some time.

"Trace Madison," Rainor ordered, "and ask New York to help."

This machinery had no more than been set in motion when the telephone rang. The chief jumped to the instrument.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "this is Rainor. Who? Cowles? You've heard what's happened? No? I thought the whole town knew by this time. Well, your father-in-law has been murdered and the bank watchman, too, and the bank has been robbed. What? About three hundred thousand, the cashier says. Uhuh! You'll hurry right down? G'-by!"

Pending the coming of Cowles the chief settled himself in the chair at the side of the desk in Walter Fleming's office. Elbows on knees and face in hands, he tried to figure it out. He supposed there was a connection between the check in the hand of the dead man and the murders, but he hadn't the remotest idea what it might be. He expected to find out from Madison himself—he was looking for the missing vice-president, but did not yet suspect him—or from Cowles, who would be there in a few

minutes. The blow which killed Fleming had been delivered from the side. That it had come from the left, where the chief was now sitting, also appeared likely. But, Rainor frowned, that brought him back to the proposition that the crime had been committed by a person of more than nodding acquaintance with the bank president, else he would not have been admitted to the building after hours.

Cowles came bustling in, exclaiming. He was a well-built man of thirty-eight or forty years. Ten years before, while cashier of the Commercial Bank, he had married Fleming's daughter. The only thing that marred his face was a certain wateriness about his smile and a manner of drawing his lids down so that the eyes were half-concealed.

"When did all this happen?" were his first words. "My God, what a terrible affair! And—and he is dead?"

Nervously he moistened his lips while the chief arose from the chair at Fleming's desk. Cowles continued:

"Have you seen Madison about it? He was to be here this afternoon. Was he?"

"What?" Chief Rainor grasped Cowles by the lapel. "Madison was to be here?"

Nodding, Cowles licked his lips again.

"Isn't he—at his apartment?"

Snatching up the telephone the chief called New York Police Headquarters.

"Look at that." He handed the Madison check to Cowles while waiting the connection to New York. "Does it mean anything to you? It was in Fleming's hand."

Cowles hesitated.

"What about it?" prompted Rainor. "Wait a second—New York? Inspector Simpson? This is Rainor, of Crosston. Say, will you speed up on this Madison we want? Murder and bank robbery! Yep, we need him a lot. Thanks!"

He talked a while longer with the New York officer, then turned again to Cowles.

"We-ll"—Cowles seemed reluctant—"you see, chief, I think Mr. Fleming was going to talk to Madison this afternoon about—some—irregularities."

"You think," fired back Rainor. "You're delaying the game. Do you know that? What d'y' mean, irregularities?"

Uneasily Cowles veiled his eyes. He stood dabbing his finger on the back of the chair in which Fleming had been found dead, fascinated by a darkening splotch of blood on it.

"Yes"—his words came slowly again—"I—know it. Mr. Fleming spoke of it to me. I wanted to be there, but he said no—he would rather be alone with Madison."

"Know anything about Madison apart from the time he has been in Crosston?"

"Nothing, except what he told us—about having come from South America, and that he had money."

"What do you take the check to mean?"

"I should say—"

"Hurry up, Mr. Cowles," begged the chief. "Every minute counts."

The other spoke more briskly:

"I should say that when he was taxed with these irregularities by Mr. Fleming he started to make restitution—"

"Has he got that much money d'y' suppose—a hundred thousand?"

"Not here—but that check on the First Empire of New York may be good. I don't know. I'd judge that he gave this check in restitution, then—"

"Then"—the chief took up the thought—"he changed his mind, murdered your father-in-law and the watchman, and looted the place of three hundred thousand in cash and securities."

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE AFTER-DECK.

A PUCKER between her lightly-sketched brows, Madeline Ruth, standing in Crosston's main street, watched Madison disappear toward the station. It had been nothing more than a hint that had come from her uncle concerning affairs at the bank. But she had gathered that something was wrong—that something momentous was impending. Now she had met John Madison hurrying from the bank on a Saturday afternoon with a bag—not the ordinary traveling bag that one would naturally carry—but a grip built for a long trip and the hard knocks that that entails. Jumping at conclusions, one might say—

Madeline Ruth put any such suspicion from her. Yet she wondered over the agitation he had so obviously suppressed. She did not like his going away—for Madeline Ruth no longer tried to hide from herself that she, at least, liked John Madison. And what she had seen in his eyes while they had struggled over what, after all, were but a few commonplaces, had held more than a suggestion that—

Madeline Ruth flushed and quickened her pace to her uncle's house. She knew he was in, for not long before she had telephoned that she was running up from a Red Cross sewing-bee.

He was settled comfortably in the smoking-room when she entered. The customary caress she bestowed on him was perfunctory this time. He squinted up questioningly at her first remark:

"Where would a man—any one who had taken a lot of money—be likely to go?"

"Bless us!" Her uncle sat up. He was a chunky person of an indeterminate fifty, who radiated good nature and comfortable belief in the whole world. With money enough to do as he pleased, he did just that and indulged his abhorrence of work. "Have you been robbed?"

The girl's head shook.

"I'm just curious," she said. "Canada?"

"Not much," replied her uncle, "if he had a chance to get headed for South America."

"Why South America?" Madeline Ruth wanted to know.

The seriousness of her way impressed itself upon her relative. Despite her denial, he guessed shrewdly that the inquiry was not idle on her part. But he knew Madeline Ruth better than to counter-question; she would tell him in her own time what it was about, if she wanted to do so; otherwise he never would learn it from her.

"Because," he explained, "there is no extradition treaty with some of the South American republics—I forget exactly which."

Madeline Ruth nodded thoughtfully. Without further allusion to the point, she switched the subject.

"How's aunty?" she asked, "and Edna, her cousin? Tell them I was in."

"Aren't you going to wait for them?" her uncle protested. "They'll be back very soon."

"No." Madeline Ruth drew her furs closer around her shoulders. "I have—another engagement."

It was only a step around to her own home, where she had continued to live with an aunt as companion since the death of her parents a couple of years back. Running up the steps she made straight for the telephone in the nook of the hall. She looked up the number of the Commercial Bank and started to give it to the operator. Then she hesitated. What if the fears that had been forming in her brain were true? Instead she telephoned Madison's apartment and, when told he was out, innocently asked his man when he would return.

"Not for some time, I believe, miss," said the man.

"Did he leave any address?"

"No, miss."

She thanked the man and hung up. Madison with his great Gladstone bag rose before her—Madison walking from the bank. He must have come from there, for his apartment was in another direction. The spice of adventure caught her blood—that and, she confessed it while she sat undecided still holding the telephone, a longing to share whatever trouble might come to John Madison.

She got up and hunted up a newspaper. In it she found an advertisement of a steamship company plying to South American ports. The telephoned the office in New York at once.

"Have you a sailing for South America to-day?" she inquired.

"No; but the Hammond line has the Monterey going out," came the reply.

"At what time?"

"Five o'clock, from Pier Q, North River."

Her "Thank you" hardly got onto the wire, for Madeline Ruth had dropped the phone and was racing up-stairs. Hastily she threw a few clothes into a bag—no more than necessary.

It was a wild undertaking, but she justified it on two grounds. She laughed as she propounded the first one: Suppose she

could save the bank from heavy loss? Her face was sober as she contemplated the second: John Madison was in bad straits when he had hurried away after looking into her eyes like that. She could help him, perhaps save him, with her money. There was a third reason, too, and her heart sang when she thought of that.

From a tiny safe in her room Madeline Ruth took a goodly roll of cash. The time still lacked fourteen minutes to three. Scribbling a note to her aunt that she would communicate, but not saying whither she might be bound, the girl called a machine and at three-fifteen was on her way to New York.

That's how Madeline Ruth happened aboard the Monterey ten minutes before she sailed. When she had bought a ticket to Porto Rico, where the Monterey was scheduled to call, the clerk had remembered Madison booking that same afternoon. So she sought the ship, sure that her man was there. Only he was no longer John Madison. At the steamship-office they had said the man she described was one John Corrigan.

Madeline Ruth's foot was on the after gangplank when she caught sight of him on the upper deck. Quickly she stepped back into the shed and went on board by the forward plank. She did not want Madison to see her until they had sailed.

Chafing at the delay, Madison paced the deck endlessly while the Monterey lay inside the Narrows with a dozen other vessels waiting for the lifting of the submarine-net. Liberty with her flaming torch mocked him as the time dragged along. The giant figure on Bedloe's Island symbolized nothing to him. Hereafter his liberty was of a doubtful quality.

The bustling traffic of small craft on the bay only added to his impatience. Everything seemed to be moving except him—who most desired to get under way.

A man at his elbow essayed a word or two, with the easy familiarity of shipboard. Madison did not encourage the approach; his taciturnity soon drove the other away.

In all the mess there was but one gleam of sunshine in his memory—Madeline

Ruth. And she also was lost. He cursed the exile he had brought upon himself.

In his state of mind, ages passed between the striking of the bells on the cluster of ships. When they did ring he hated the deliberate measure of their strokes. Every hour was going to count with him, and here he was tied up. Seven bells—half past seven—had sounded when he turned from the rail over which he had been hanging. An exclamation burst from him. He was face to face with Madeline Ruth.

The girl, too, gasped. She had not counted on a meeting so soon. To prevent such a happening she had cooped herself in her stateroom immediately upon going aboard. Wearied by more than two hours in its narrow confines, she had risked a stroll, counting upon the falling darkness to cloak her in case Madison did loom near. She had failed to recognize the bent figure at the rail. A yard was all that separated them when his abrupt movement threw him directly in her path.

The girl had the advantage; she had known he was on the ship; nevertheless, she was as greatly at a loss as he. Embarrassment was holding both dumb when a submarine-chaser sputtering among the clutter of ships created a welcome diversion. Through a megaphone an officer aboard the chaser was shouting that the steamers might proceed. From a guard-ship a search-light with snapping shutter was blinking out the message in the international code. That gave Madison time to collect himself. He was by far the more composed of the two when he tucked Madeline Ruth's arm into his own and strode firmly along.

There were complications in sight which the girl had not considered in the moment of her wild decision to follow Madison. They tumbled in pell-mell on her now and left her wondering. What was Madison going to think of her? What would other people think?

For a flash she regretted and thought of asking to be put ashore; but that was only for a second. She would see it out. She could stand whatever they might say. And as for Madison—she was not afraid of what he would think.

They walked once around the ship before either spoke. Madison saw the determination in her face. Once or twice when she looked up, her eyes seemed to bore into his.

It was chance that had brought her to the Monterey, he told himself. It was ridiculous to imagine that she had followed him. At the same time he saw that she must have reached a quick decision, for certainly she had shown no evidence of a prospective ocean-trip when she had said good-by that afternoon. He took a short cut to the answer.

"Where are you going, Miss Ruth?" His tone was harsh to his own ears, although he did not mean it to be so. He was annoyed that his course should have been so plainly blazoned.

"Porto Rico," she said steadily enough. "Perhaps—South America."

He smiled.

"Rather a sudden impulse, isn't it?"

"Yes." Her face turned up to his. "Like yours."

Frankly he met her gaze, with the ghost of a smile over the shaft into which she had turned his question.

"Let's go aft where it's quiet," he suggested, "and—talk it over."

At the break of the deck they hesitated as the Monterey throbbed again with the starting of her engines. She was going astern to make way for a freighter to starboard which had the right of way. They commented on the line of ships filing out through the gate in the net—Liberty, who now stood out in glory amid a blaze of light.

Not until they stood together at the taffrail, with none near to hear them, did they mention the matter uppermost in their minds. Madeline Ruth broke the ice.

"You are—running away?" Her words were tentative.

Madison started. He had not been prepared for so—so brutal an opening. While he hesitated, she studied him as best she could in the darkness, peering within a few inches of his face. There was nothing small about his features; she knew that. From the high forehead with its wisp of brown hair trailing from under his cap, to the square chin that bespoke power, Madison carried an atmosphere of trust.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I am—running away. I didn't think any one would catch up on me so quickly." His laugh sounded bitter. "Perhaps I might as well quit now."

"What do you mean—exactly?"

"Simply that if you could trace me in an hour," he retorted, "they will do it in less than that."

"They?"

Involuntarily he smiled at the inflection she gave the word.

"The police, of course," he elaborated. "From whom else would a man run?"

"You have done—what?"

"Nothing," he answered distinctly. "Not a thing."

Leaning over the rail, she watched the water broiling away from the propellers. The ship was taking way in the procession and nosing into the Narrows.

"Add something to that," she said at length. "You cannot expect me to—believe it."

"That is just the point," he said quietly and rested his elbows on the rail beside her. "You must believe it unless—" He left the sentence unfinished.

"Unless," she rounded it out for him, "I give you up?"

"Precisely. But, Madeline Ruth"—she tingled at the use of her name—"you would not if you knew the circumstances."

She turned to confront him. Her hand touched his arm.

"Why not tell me what they are?"

Madison's teeth grated. He condemned himself for a fool. His hand closed on hers and she let it rest. He became very earnest.

"Madeline Ruth,"—he bent toward her—"there is nothing that I can tell. You'll have to take me on my word. Later, if I pull through, you can forget that you saw me on this ship." He pressed her hand fiercely. "Why did you come aboard?" he demanded.

"Because," she stammered, "because I was afraid—"

"Of what?" he prompted when she stopped.

"That you—" Again she checked herself. "My uncle had said—there was something wrong at the bank," she added desperately.

The man's jaws clicked together.

"What had that to do with me?"

"Nothing—except that you seemed so—queer to-day, and you—were coming from the bank with a bag."

A sinking feeling swept over Madison. He must have been wrong when he had thought that he and Madeline Ruth—

"You mean that you suspected me?" His voice was level.

"Not altogether that, John." His name was out before she realized. "And if I had—"

Madison heard her crying softly. He didn't understand her motive in following him.

"Don't you see how fearfully you have compromised yourself, Madeline?"

Light broke on him with her next words, and he lamented anew his need of flight.

"It isn't that what worries me, John," she whispered. "It is that you may be caught through me."

"Did you tell any one you were coming?"

She shook her head.

"But I signed my own name to the passenger-list," she went on. "With both of us gone, they may assume—"

"That we have gone together," he ended grimly.

Like a rocket the solution of probably both his own problem and hers entered his mind. The steamer was turning her prow into the lower bay.

"Wait," he commanded.

Before she could reply he was gone. In the half-minute by herself Madeline understood what a pass she had brought herself into. She believed, too, that she had increased whatever danger Madison was in. When he returned she was standing expectantly. His bulkier appearance even in the darkness was noticeable.

"In a happier situation, Madeline,"—the ring of his voice brought her joy—"you and I—" He broke off and took her face between his hands. The feasting of his eyes made her quivering faint. "I did not know till this afternoon how much you had become to me, Madeline. Not until we said good-by—and at that time it was the last good-by. I never expected to see you again."

He felt her trembling as her hands stole up to his shoulders.

"That is what I feared, John." It was no more than a murmur. "Let there be no last good-by."

Passion gripped Madison. He was finding love when he could not but lose it; he was doomed to go on alone.

"John," she pleaded when he did not answer, "let me go with you. Let us go back and—"

"There can be no going back," he said sharply.

The search-light of a patrolling cruiser focused on the Monterey amidships, swung to the forepeak, then traveled slowly aft. It rested on the two figures at the stern, revealing in its brilliance the despair in the man's face and the grasping hope in the girl's. Notwithstanding his admission that he was fleeing from the police, she believed in him. In her the man saw one worth while as a staunch comrade and raged that he was not free.

Five seconds maybe the light clung to them, to dance away over the seas and die, so all grew dark again.

Madison glanced anxiously at the receding shore. The Monterey was gathering speed, cutting across the lower bay toward Sandy Hook. With a sweep he took the girl in his arms.

"Promise me that you will say nothing about what I do," he urged.

Fright lit her eyes. Her arms closed tight about his neck.

"Will you hold your nerve and say nothing?" he repeated. "Tell me that you will, Madeline."

She looked wildly at him.

"Of course, John, I will," she whispered, "but—what are you going to do?"

Again his face turned shoreward. It was probably a mile distant. He dared not delay longer. Gently he detached her arms.

"I am in your hands now, Madeline," he declared. "It all rests with you whether I have—a chance." He walked to both sides of the after deck-house behind which they were, and looked searchingly. There was no one near by.

"Silence now will help me, Madeline," he said again, crushing her to his breast.

He pressed a slip of paper into her hand. "Here is the address of a friend I can trust in New York. I'll let you hear from me through him." Her blood ran riot as his lips seized hers. "I love you, girl, I love you," he breathed. Dizzy with happiness, she did not at once grasp the import of his next remark: "Don't be alarmed, Madeline—I have on a life-belt—good-by, Madeline Ruth."

She almost fell to the deck, so suddenly did he let her go. A scream rose to her lips, but died in a gasping moan. For Madison had mounted the rail and dived overboard.

She saw his flying body silhouetted against the white foam of the wake, saw him plunge in a good twenty feet away. A bobbing head held her eye, and she waved in response to an arm that swung upward from the swimming man. Then the steamer rushing on through the night left him there alone, an atom in a rolling world, making a desperate bid for freedom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NET IS FLUNG.

SUNDAY morning, before the Fleming-King murder and bank-robbery were twelve hours old, it was known that John Madison had fled. Fallon was telling then of his talk with the fugitive on the train, but despite the overwhelming circumstantial evidence he found himself inclining to the defense of Madison. Others were relating how he had passed down to the station at Crosston about two o'clock the previous afternoon, carrying a bulky grip.

The New York police soon furnished the connecting link—that under the name of Corrigan, Madison had sailed on the steamship Monterey for Porto Rico and South America.

Chief of Police Rainor was with Hugh Cowles in the bank, going over the books, when that word came.

"We'll get him now," said the chief, rubbing his hands in satisfaction. "An awful chump to think he could get away like that. Now let's see just how much he got out of here."

The effects of a sleepless night were plain on Cowles's face. His drooping lids seemed farther down than ever, lending a lizardlike expression; his thin lips more tightly compressed. It was evident that the bank treasurer was severely shaken by the murder of the Commercial's president, his father-in-law.

"The two hundred thousand cash in the little safe," he said, consulting a slip, except for fifty thousand-dollar bills, was in tens, twenties, fifties, and hundreds. Not hard to get away with, chief, for money packs up in small compass. The bonds that are missing total close to a good hundred thousand, and could be disposed of easily."

"What of the irregularities, as you called them, that Mr. Fleming called Madison in to talk about?"

Cowles opened one of the ledgers he had been going over for hours.

"This is Madison's account," he said. "It has been juggled through the use of notes and drafts so that he has swindled the bank out of nearly a quarter of a million. That shows as far as I have gone. The bank examiners probably will be able to trace more than that."

The chief was puzzled.

"How could he get away with stuff like that?"

"I don't know, unless it was by gulling father-in-law. Mr. Fleming thought a lot of Madison. You know that; everybody here did. I never could quite understand how he hypnotized the town."

Rainor grunted.

"Smooth birds like that can put it over. Lord knows where he got the bundle of money he had when he came here."

"I've been thinking of that, too," Cowles tried to laugh, then his face clouded. "No doubt that he will be arrested, is there, Rainor?"

"I should say not." The chief thumped a desk emphatically. "New York now is shooting a wireless to the steamer ordering his arrest. We can expect the answer any time."

He sat back and, chuckling, lit a cigar. They had made short work of Madison, all right, and the chief was tickled clear down

to his heels. Thought he could pull a job like that in Crosston, did he? Chief Rainor blew a smoke-ring and watched it waft upward and dissipate.

"How about that check that the old man had hold of?" he asked.

"I called an official of the First Empire, on which the draft is made, and he says Madison has a large balance there, probably enough to meet it. He is going to look up the account to-day and let me know."

"Say, Cowles," Chief Rainor branched off abruptly, "it's too darned bad you didn't insist on being at that conference here yesterday afternoon."

Cowles walked the length of the room. As he came back facing the policeman, his slaty eyes were on the floor.

"I have thought that all night," he said a trifle unsteadily. "But you see how it was. I never suspected there would be any trouble; never even that there was anything seriously wrong."

"Too bad, too bad," lamented the chief again. He flicked his cigar-ashes onto the expensive rug in the president's office, a rug still warm with a murdered man's steps, and spat into a waste-basket. "You know, Cowles, I hate to have anything like this happen in town; although"—he swelled a little—"although we do make such a fast clean-up on it."

A cigarette from which Cowles had taken but a puff or two fell from his fingers. He ground it under his heel and lit another, but that wasn't half done when he threw it away. He cast a sidelong glance at his shaking hand, and stopped his pacing to confront the police chief.

"There'll be no slip-up on this, Rainor?" he asked.

Chief Rainor laughed boisterously.

"Slip-up," he echoed. "Say, we've got that fellow right in our hands. And, if I do say it, it's been mighty quick work—both the man and the dough inside about twelve hours." He looked quizzically at Cowles:

"Where'd you go yesterday afternoon?"

It was only an idle question, but it brought Cowles around sharply. He hesitated almost imperceptibly:

"I—stayed around home a spell, then in the evening—I went motoring."

Through hooded eyes he watched the policeman. The query had sounded harsh to his ears.

Those not incapacitated by the choppy sea that had come up during the night were mooning around on the Monterey when on Sunday afternoon the wireless crackled its demand for the arrest of John Madison, alias John Corrigan.

Madeline Ruth saw the steward carry the yellow slip from the wireless-room to the captain on the bridge, but did not suspect its import until after an order the second mate came down to the deck and made straight for Madison's stateroom.

The girl was standing near by waiting for something like this to happen, but she had not expected the law to reach out so promptly. She was on tiptoe awaiting the revelation of what they would say Madison had done.

As the mate reached Madison's door there on the upper deck, he signaled to two stewards to stand by him before he rapped. A faint smile illuminated Madeline's face and she turned away to hide it. Already the sing-song of the stewards paging "Mr. Corrigan" throughout the ship, came to the girl. The ship's carpenter was called to to break into the stateroom. It was empty, of course, except for Madison's bag.

After another vain hunt that extended into every corner of the vessel the captain began an inquisition among the passengers to uncover the latest trace of Madison. Every one was asked to assemble on the upper deck, and from the bridge the captain made his inquiry.

John Madison, alias Corrigan, he said, was wanted for murdering two men and robbing a bank of upward of nearly half a million dollars in cash and securities. The table steward remembered assigning him to a place the evening before. Now he did not appear to be aboard the ship.

"Has any one seen him this morning?"

The captain looked over the hundred and fifty passengers grouped on the deck below him. No one answered.

Murder and robbery! Madeline Ruth's thoughts revolved like lightning. That was more dreadful than she had expected. The

great decision was before her now. She wavered—she could not help it. Should she tell that he had gone into the sea? Or say that she had seen him hanging over the stern late, the night before?

Her heart ruled her mind. It could not believe he was guilty. And her heart answered:

"I saw him—late last night."

"Will you come up here, please, madam?" the captain invited.

Bowing assent she made her way to the bridge-ladder while the other passengers eyed her curiously and turned to one another to buzz over the news that they had had a murderer among them.

Madeline's face was frank as she took the hand the captain reached down to help her up the last few of the steep rungs. She never had been on the bridge of a ship before, and the sight interested her; the polished brass of the engine-room telegraphs, the swaying binnacle, and the glimpse of the helmsman in the pilot-house. But she had not much time to take all that in just now; she was too busy working out her replies to the questions she knew were coming.

"You saw him last night?" led the captain. "Tell us when and where."

She recounted that about ten o'clock, when taking a final walk around the deck, she had come upon him.

"I spoke with him," she added. "He was leaning over the rail and appeared very dejected." She felt invigorated now she was fighting for him.

The captain set the mate to make another and more thorough search of the ship.

"Not that I think it is going to produce any result," he admitted to Madeline, "because I think the poor devil lost his nerve—or got it—and went overboard."

Long, dark lashes veiled the sparkle in her eyes.

"You think that?" she asked quickly.

"Don't you think it a fairly reasonable, logical conclusion, young lady?" The captain turned a kindly look on her.

"Ye-es; I think so."

Once more her gaze went backward.

"Where are you going, Miss Ruth?"

"Porto Rico."

"For long?" the captain went on. "They probably will want some sort of a deposition from you."

"Not for long." She shook her head. "I am taking a vacation, that is all."

"The purser will make a rough note of your testimony and you can swear to it. Where can they get in touch with you if they want to later on?"

"Crosston," she answered, and waited.

The captain looked suspiciously.

"Then you knew him? That's where he is wanted."

"Yes," said Madeleine. "I knew him."

The skipper's expression was not lost to her. She knew that he was only thinking—the thoughts others would say.

As a matter of fact, he was wondering whether he ought to restrain her. If she had fled with Madison, she, too, might go overboard; and he didn't want two suicides on one trip. He asked more about herself, and why she was aboard. That her uncle was a director of the bank, and that she was of some social standing, helped to allay his suspicions. On why she had sailed on the Monterey she was not so convincing. He wirelessly Crosston for confirmation of her statements and asked if she should be held.

"We'll turn the ship upside down," she heard him say as she walked away, "but it won't gain anything. He's gone, sure enough. Oh, Miss Ruth, will you stop at the purser's office and make a statement? I'll swear it."

Standing there braced against the fresh head-wind, she made a striking picture, the glow of health was on her cheeks, and her bright eyes swept back and forth, while a strand of deep, rich-colored hair streamed from under her tam-o'-shanter, and lent the necessary contrast to her complexion.

The captain was helping her down the ladder, when she halted. Her request made him regard her more curiously.

"Could you put me aboard a ship bound for New York?" she asked.

"Why?"

Her clear face turned full upon him.

"Because I want to go home," she stated simply. "I knew Mr. Fleming, who is dead—my own interests are involved."

"We'll see," he answered. He wanted word from Crosston before he let her out of sight. "We may not meet another vessel."

"If we do?" she persisted.

"Perhaps it can be arranged," he said non-committally.

He stood watching her step lightly along the deck, admiring her trimness and her poise. But he detailed a steward to watch her.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW SCENT.

TO say the least of it, Chief Rainor was upset when the radio flashed back to New York and the telephone relayed the word to Crosston that John Madison was no longer aboard the Monterey. It did not please him even to hear that Madison had committed suicide as the message stated. There was small consolation in that compared to the glory that he had seen within his grasp when the fugitive was brought back.

Rainor was a good policeman. He had an efficient department for the size of the town. But he got sore at being robbed of this triumph. He had pictured himself meeting the ship that brought Madison back to the United States; had seen himself returning to Crosston with his celebrated prisoner in irons. Now that prospect was dispelled.

The chief was roundly condemning Madison for cheating him of just laurels when Hugh Cowles entered. The news had been telephoned to him. He lost no time in getting to the point.

"Are you sure of this?" he demanded severely.

Disgust was on the chief's face and his remark was dry:

"If you can find him aboard that ship, I wish you would. Nobody'd be more tickled than myself."

Cowles's agitation expressed itself in a nervous puttering with some odds and ends of the chief's desk.

"Fine," he declared. "Are—are you sure he sailed on that ship?"

"We are," the answer was weary. "What d'y' think?"

Cowles squinted at the policeman.

"Fine," he repeated, rubbing his hands.

Rainor settled back in his chair and swore picturesquely. Cowles studied him before he spoke again.

"But the money—that half million and more he got away with. Where is that, I'd like to know?"

"Search me." Chief Rainor shrugged. "There's the rotten end. We've got to find the stuff but we can't get the man. Hell. I'd rather have had him."

"Was it not in—his baggage?"

"For the love of Heaven, Cowles, think," snapped the chief. "If it had been in his baggage wouldn't we know where it was? He had only a grip with him and the wireless says it was empty except for a few clothes."

Up and down paced Cowles, lighting cigarettes and casting them away. He brought up with a start as Chief Rainor asked:

"How about that hundred thousand check?"

"Oh— He had that much and more in the First Empire Bank, but even counting that as recovered, we lose twice that amount—apart from what he already had stolen." Cowles stalled, then added: "Unless you can find where he hid it."

"Find it," snorted Rainor. "I'd give that much if we had him. You only lose money, but I lose—a man."

The mealy smile came to Cowles's lips.

"He's lost, chief," he said. "But—doesn't that solve the case?"

With a jerk Rainor sat up. His face took on a new light and he smashed one hand into the other.

"By jinks," he swore, "I don't know. What about the girl?"

"Girl," repeated Cowles. "What girl?"

"Madeline Ruth! She's the only one that saw him aboard that confounded ship. Where does she come in?"

Through slits of eyes, Cowles stared.

"You don't mean that, surely?"

"Why not?" growled Rainor. "How'd I know she wasn't in with him—planted to pass a phony steer?"

Cowles bit at his finger ends and protested feebly:

"But you know her—know her people. She would not have any hand in a thing like this."

"Of course nobody but roughnecks ever get mixed up," jeered Rainor. "What y' talking about? Mebbe she was stuck on him—I don't know. She's the little joker in this deck."

Another U-boat warning saved Madeline Ruth from the experience of being transferred from one ship to another in a rising sea. The Monterey had scarcely arranged a meeting with a northbound vessel, then less than fifty miles away, when the radio gathered in the warning crashed out from a British cruiser.

On top of that came orders from an American patrol ship and from land stations for all vessels to run for shelter. Shifting her course almost due west the Monterey fired up to her best seventeen knots, headed for the Virginia Capes. On navy instructions she had been steering a course closer to land than usual and was only about forty miles from a haven.

That night, therefore, Madeline Ruth was put ashore at Newport News, and while the Monterey lay in the shelter of Fortress Monroe, prepared to hurry back to Cross-ton. The captain of the Monterey let her depart without further question, for the Crosston authorities in answer to his query, had expressed a desire that she be allowed to return as soon as possible.

Early Monday on her return home, Madeline Ruth found Chief Rainor waiting for her with bells on. Only the presence of her uncle and her own social position, kept him from going after her roughshod, because Rainor was convinced that she had eloped with Madison and knew more about his supposed suicide than she had told. She was prepared for all that and held her ground. Her pallor and tight-clenched hands alone betrayed the strain she was under.

She had telephoned from the station for her uncle to go to her house. She wanted the moral support of his presence at any rate. He was there when she arrived.

Rainor followed before she had time to change from her traveling dress.

He was pacing up and down the library impatiently when, turning in his stride, he saw her standing in the door, her hand lightly brushing the drapery. The chief shot a look at her uncle who sat fingering a magazine, his expression divided between condemnation and amusement. He knew Madeline Ruth and had no fears on her part. He was afraid only of the construction others might put on the affair.

Chief Rainor decided to be blunt:

"Why did you go away with Madison?"

Madeline's uncle raised a hand in protest but she answered for herself from the doorway:

"I didn't."

"How'd you jump so suddenly onto that ship then?" fired Rainor.

"It wasn't sudden," she said defiantly.

"You didn't buy your ticket until after you had seen him Saturday," challenged Rainor.

"What's that got to do with it?"

She walked into the room and invited her inquisitor to be seated.

"I'll stand," he said ungracefully.

Madeline perched herself on the arm of her uncle's chair and put an arm about his neck.

"Very well," she smiled. "You may."

Rainor's screwed-up face showed his perplexity. He took a more mellow course.

"Don't you want to help us in this, Miss Ruth?" he asked.

"Ye-es," she answered slowly. "What can I do?"

"Tell us all you know—"

Her eyes became cold and she interrupted:

"Don't you think I have done so?"

The chief mopped his face and plunged:

"Honestly, Miss Ruth, I do not."

"Then," she said rising to her feet, "why continue the conversation?"

Rainor's head bent forward, towering her.

"D'you mean you won't tell any more?"

"How can I, Mr. Rainor," her tone was icy, "when—there is nothing more to tell?"

Then came the chief's heavy artillery:

"Suppose we arrest you?" he snapped.

The girl's laughter resounded, although deep in her heart she was frightened.

"Arrest *me*?"

For the first time her uncle put in a word:

"Don't you think you're going a little strong, Rainor?"

"No, I don't," the chief wheeled on him.

"We can take her as an accessory—*mebbe*."

"You couldn't go far on that," said Madeline's uncle mildly. "We might object."

Rainor saw the futility of pressing the girl further at that time.

"All right," he said, "but believe me I'm gonna get to the very bottom of this and if we can show anything—"

The threat was in what he left unsaid.

"Thank you," responded Madeline Ruth quietly. "We'll be ready for the situation when it arises. Meanwhile—"

Rainor started to speak but apparently thought better of it.

"Why not say it?" she challenged.

A moment he sputtered then blurted:

"You were in love with him, weren't you?"

It was undiplomatic to a degree and he regretted the words at once. Her face flamed scarlet, then settled again white in anger. Her uncle rose but she forestalled him.

"That, Mr. Rainor, is none of your business," she said evenly. "And if it were so—it still would be none of your business."

"Yes, I guess that's far enough, Rainor," remarked her uncle.

Madeline walked to the window.

"I'm sorry," the chief apologized to her back, "I didn't mean to put it just like that."

As he moved to leave the room she turned and bowed. Her head was high as the chief was shown out, but once he had gone her composure gave way. The front door was still closing on the policeman when her head buried in her uncle's chest, she burst out crying.

"Tell me about it Little Sunshine," he smiled and petted her as he used the old name. And, glad to have some one to con-

fide in, some one who would believe in her as she believed in Madison, she told him—part.

CHAPTER VI.

COVERING THE TRAIL.

IN the brief moments that elapsed between the impulse and his leap into the water, Madison had weighed the chances. As a man accustomed to notice details, as he had had to do many a time for his own preservation in the wilds, he had seen that the tide was rising. That would help him landward if he had to swim.

Buoyed up with the life-belt, he did not doubt that he could make the distance to shore, for he was a powerful swimmer and more than once had been forced to battle for life in treacherous rapids. Most of all, however, he counted on being picked up by one of the scurrying mosquito patrol fleet or by some other ship. Then if he succeeded in effacing himself without letting his rescuers study him too closely in a clear light, he might still get away. There would be no hue and cry for him yet. And the thought again obtruded itself that here probably was his whole solution—for if Madeline Ruth helped it might be made to appear that he had committed suicide off the Monterey at sea. His disappearance from the ship would not be discovered that night; not for another day perhaps unless his trail were picked up faster than he expected.

Madison had been swimming an hour and the Staten Island shore was not appreciably nearer when the chill of the water began to eat into him. The only craft that had passed near him were a tug and a string of barges. His shouts had apparently gone unheard.

Swimming became more and more difficult. Hands and feet were numb and he had to rest frequently. It was a bigger task than he had anticipated.

What he would do if ever he got ashore again he didn't know. At the instant he didn't devote much thought to that. He was worried lest after all he failed of rescue. Evidently Madeline Ruth had decided to

stand by him; otherwise the Monterey would have stopped to search.

He laughed grimly at the idea that the impression that he had drowned possibly would become fact.

Another age passed. He was close to exhaustion. He knew it was largely a case of the life-belt holding him up now. Even at that he had trouble keeping his head out of the water for his neck was cramped. And the shore was still a good half-mile away.

Such was his plight when a patrolling motorboat ran close by. The naval reservists aboard it heard his cries and swung the little search-light about until it found him.

A steamer, he said, had run down his launch and failed to pick him up. His home was in St. George on Staten Island—would they land him there? The speedy chaser did so at once and a few minutes later, still in his dripping clothes, he was in a near-by saloon getting a needed drink.

There he told the bartender that he lived in New York and bought from him an old suit of clothes which fitted in a sort of way. He sent out after a shirt and underclothes and in a back room of the saloon he changed. Wrapping up his wet clothes in a bundle, he left the place. His course was now decided.

It was eleven o'clock when he returned to the docks. He knew something of the sea and was husky enough to sign up as a deck-hand.

Under the arc lights on the pier he saw a trampish-looking vessel. The last of her hatches was being battened down. Smoke pouring from her funnel indicated that she was soon to sail.

A bosun held him up as he went aboard.

"Any chance for a job?" asked Madison.

"Gawan see the mate," said the bosun, "he's on the bridge."

Madison halted at the foot of the bridge ladder and scraped his feet to attract attention. A man looked down.

"What is it?"

"Mr. Mate?" inquired Madison politely.

"Yeh." The mate sized him up. "Want a job?"

Madison nodded.

"Gotta discharge?"

"No," Madison hesitated. "I haven't sailed for a couple of years. Made a little money and quit."

The fat money belt at his waist gave his words the lie and made him smile.

"Blown it in and goin' back," grinned the mate. "All right, my man, I'll sign you. With all them damned munitions shops ashore it's darned hard to get a crew."

Not until after he had signed the articles did Madison throw out a feeler as to where the ship was bound. He didn't want to seem anxious about that. When told it was New Orleans—she was going there practically light—to load cotton for England, he was pleased for there he would stand fair chance of getting easily to South America.

"Y'aren't scared of bein' U-boatted?"

A genuine laugh led Madison's reply. A submarine would at least give him a show. Ashore he would have none if captured.

"No, sir," he said. "When do we sail?"

"Daylight," answered the mate. "Go for'ard and find a bunk. Y' can turn in for a coupla hours if you want."

Thus Madison with his bundle under his arm went into the forecastle of the steamship *Flying Prince*, a nondescript of the seas with spindly smokestack and masts that were no more than derrick poles out of plumb. Rust streaked and splashed here and there with red lead paint over patched plates and rivets, she looked her part—a hobo of the ocean, harking where freights offered and caring naught for her looks.

Dumping his bundle into an unoccupied bunk, Madison went out and climbed to the forepeak. Squatting there he looked over at the lights of Manhattan and wondered if he ever would see them again. His glance traveled backward over the *Flying Prince* and in the battered ship he felt that he had found a comrade. He likewise was a wanderer, bound now by the toss of a coin for New Orleans and after that he knew not where.

Something of misgiving came over Madison as the *Flying Prince* emerged from the South Pass of the Mississippi delta into the strong current of the stream proper. It was nine days since he had sailed from New

York. At quarantine, government officers would come aboard. He did not want to see officers of any kind. When, their inspection done, they went over the side again, he breathed more freely.

The long slow journey up the river to the Crescent City was interminable. His nerves were crackling when at last the tramp tied up. Of course he was going to desert. The trip to England wouldn't help him any. A ship to South America was the thing. That evening he got shore liberty.

The broad expanse of Canal Street, stretching from the docks on through the heart of the city, was only a stone's throw from where he landed. He struck up it, trying to recall locations from the last time he had been in New Orleans nearly ten years before. Down here was the part of the town he had liked. The picturesque old French and Spanish houses with their odd projecting balconies on the upper floors almost made him forget that his first necessity was to get under cover. The quaint gardens with their myriad flowers and trilling birds, brought home to him again that exotic flavor which belongs alone to New Orleans of all the cities in North America.

A few blocks up he stopped to get his bearings—and became aware of a more than passing scrutiny from a man who bore some of the earmarks of a policeman.

Resisting a temptation to hurry, Madison remained looking carelessly about. When he did move on it was at a saunter, pausing at shop windows and controlling any suggestion of anxiety or haste. The man, he observed, was following.

The fugitive turned in his tracks and was satisfied with his suspicions when the other found something to hold his attention in a window. At a saloon a couple of doors from a corner Madison halted. Standing at the door, hands in pockets and unfurried, he viewed the prospect. He could tell that his shadower was puzzled by the indecisive manner in which he stood at the curb squinting at his quarry. The detective, in truth, was trying to place his man. He had a hazy idea that he ought to know Madison.

For the life of him, he couldn't make up his mind whether Madison was an old-timer

returned or somebody that had figured in a circular. That was what the detective wanted to be sure of before he made any approach. He flattered himself that he could hang onto Madison and that the true remembrance would come later. He might even meet up with one of his partners who would be able to "make" the suspect.

To Madison it appeared that the best he could do was show absolute unconcern until the opportunity arose to escape from the predicament. Wherefore he lounged a full ten minutes at the saloon door as though waiting for some one. At the same time his mind was working fast, seeking a way out. Inspiration came when his eye fell on the name of the intersecting street. It was the Rue Royale. And he recalled that in passing up Canal Street he had seen the name of the saloon over an entrance just around the corner. If the saloon ran in an "L" as he naturally concluded it did, with an opening on both streets, there was a chance right here at hand.

Madison stepped through the swinging doors—and at once stepped out again. His reappearance removed the last shred of doubt that he was being followed, for it caused the sleuth to balk in his stride toward the saloon. Whereat Madison looked up and down the street, consulted his watch and turned into the saloon once more. The other man he figured would be more wary now in his movements; which was so.

Unhurriedly Madison walked along the bar, continuing his camouflage that he was on the lookout for some one, and dawdled round the L. In a mirror he saw the detective enter the Canal Street door. While the sleuth scanned the faces along the bar, Madison got into the Rue Royale. Around the corner, back into Canal Street he went. A cautious glance over the swinging doors of the cafe showed him his pursuer was out of sight. Whereat, still without haste, Madison reentered the saloon.

The powers of observation cultivated on mountain and in jungle again came to his aid. On his first passage through the café his eye had registered a telephone booth in a nook just inside the entrance. Its door was sidewise to the bar. He had

picked it as a hiding place. Getting into the booth he crouched down and prayed that no one would want to make a call for a few minutes.

Meanwhile the detective, out on the Rue Royale, was more puzzled than ever and more convinced that Madison was wanted for something. He went briskly to the corner seeking a sign of his man, but Madison was out of sight. Twenty yards away on the Rue Royale was an alley. The sleuth concluded Madison had made a dash through there and made for it. And, while his hunter was circling a block away, Madison escaped from the telephone booth. He hailed a cab at random, for want of more definite thought, gave his destination as Illinois Central Railroad yards.

Sight of the trains braced his spirits and emphasized the necessity of action. He understood how narrow had been his escape and that the palpable doubt under which the detective had labored must have been removed by the way his quarry had broken away. Wherefore, thought Madison, an alarm would go out whether they placed him or not.

That barred him practically from any possibility of getting a ship. The docks would be watched closely. Also it excluded him from the railroad stations. There was only one other way out—a freight train, if he could get one without too great a delay. He never had attempted train-riding, but now was the time he must learn. The dusk would give him a show of getting aboard.

Paying his driver he cut across the yards through the jungle of freight cars and picked out a train that seemed on the point of leaving. As he walked beside it looking for a corner into which to sneak, a hail brought him up.

In imagination he felt a hand on his shoulder, the handcuffs going about his wrists. Wheeling slowly he waited for the man who walked toward him. There wasn't any use putting up a fight—he could see that.

"Want a job?"

So far were they from what he had expected, the words dazed him. The train began to move.

"Quick," said his questioner. "You look like you were gonna grab a ride. Get aboard an' I'll give you five dollars and the ride for nothing."

The rumbling of the cars brought Madison back to his senses. He heard the next abjuration more distinctly.

"It's a banana train an' we're shy of guards. Nothing to do but ride." The man grasped a car ladder and swung himself on board. "Come on, bo, five dollars an' the ride—no chance of being thrown off."

Smiling again, Madison grabbed the iron rungs on the next car and hoisted himself easily upward.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE HAS SOME FUN.

SURREPTITIOUSLY, because she was aware Rainor was having her watched,

Madeline Ruth communicated with the friend whose address in New York Madison had given her in that last moment on the Monterey. Eleven days passed before there was any word for her. It came in a note mailed by Madison in St. Louis, telling briefly how he had been driven far from his objective, South America, after his arrival in New Orleans. The banana train, he mentioned, was being cut in two at St. Louis and he had decided to go along on the section routed to Chicago. He asked that anything of interest to him which might have turned up, be addressed at once to "John Armstrong," at a hotel in Chicago. The place was one he remembered, a small quiet hotel on Twenty-Second Street.

What Madeline Ruth wanted was a talk with Madison. The only way she could get that was to go to him. But if she did that she would lead the police. Her shadow surely would go after her. A few days before she had taken a trip by train to verify her fears. She had so maneuvered that she could pick out the detectives before boarding the train. The man had gone along, stayed close to her while she roamed aimlessly in the town at which she stopped, and had returned on the same train.

Determined to see Madison, however, she

cast about for ways and means of eluding the police. Her uncle seemed the most likely aid. She had not told him the actual fact about Madison having dropped into the sea where he was practically certain to get ashore, but he had deduced that Madison was far from dead.

Kindly quizzing had shown her uncle that Rainor's guess about her affections was correct. His knowledge of her character, coupled with his personal contact with Madison, had done much to enlist him on the side of the fugitive.

Consequently, when Madeline came to him in her extremity, he was not averse to helping her, although he realized that possibly he would be lending a hand to defeat the ends of justice. He was not convinced by the circumstantial case against Madison. Madeline's remark now, her seriousness and the longing in her voice, had their effect on him.

"I want to get out of town," she opened, "and I need help."

Her uncle smiled indulgently. He understood about the shadow.

"Something may come out of the trip," she added thoughtfully. "I—I believe it will."

Patiently he waited for more—for her to get around to the point in her own way. He assumed that the "something" would have to do with Madison's case though she had not informed him of having received word from the fugitive.

"What sort of help?" he asked.

"I have to get away from the police," said Madeline Ruth.

Her uncle laughed.

"Aren't you beginning to feel like a criminal yourself?" he tantalized. "Chased back and forth by a detective on your heels all the time—and you call yourself a good citizen."

"There's where you come in," she smiled back. "You'll get rid of the detective."

The ruddy jovial face sobered as he whispered mock-seriously:

"You don't mean that you want me to—gun him?"

"Don't tease," said the girl. "I've worked out a scheme. All you have to do—"

The grin returned to him as she detailed her plan.

"I'll do it," he chuckled. "When do we start?"

"In the morning," she said and hugged him.

Nine o'clock next morning saw Madeline's uncle call for her. Immediately they left her house. The shadow, she perceived, was a very material presence on the corner.

Chatting gaily they walked part of the way down-town, rode on a street car, then walked again. All of which was to give uncle opportunity to take especial stock of said shadow. On the train uncle studied his man some more. By the time they reached New York he could have picked the sleuth out of a million.

To make it easy for the detective they went slowly from Grand Central over Forty-Fourth Street instead of Forty-Second to avoid the crowd. They wanted to keep an eye on the sleuth as much as he desired to retain them within his view.

Entering a department store on Fifth Avenue, they backed and filled, Madeline Ruth chattering on this and that and her uncle making a bulky good-humored background. Half an hour went like that before the girl tarried at an angle of a counter on the second floor. The sleuth was still in evidence, at the instant imitating interest in a corset display twenty feet away.

"It's time," murmured Madeline. Her uncle strolled off. While he circled, Madeline remained looking over the blouses on the counter as though she found difficulty in making a selection. The salesgirl stood more or less in repose before her, wondering abstractedly whether she was up against a shoplifter and whether she should keep a date that night.

Without warning, a hearty voice exclaimed in the fashion known to wildest melodrama:

"Aha! You would, would you!"

Everybody on the floor heard it. Everybody turned to its source—all except Madeline Ruth. The words were her cue. A glimpse told her it was safe to exit. Her uncle was holding fast to the sleuth and a crowd was pressing about them.

Smiling buoyantly at the salesgirl she laid a dollar on the counter.

"For you," she said, "because I didn't really want anything."

The girl gaped. "Nut," she muttered, taking the dollar and watching Madeline Ruth disappear down a stairway.

The hubbub along the aisle swelled. Madeline's uncle, the whole two hundred and sixty pounds of him, remained anchored to the Crosston sleuth's arm. The shoppers close about them were telling one another a hundred reasons, all different, for the commotion.

Word rushed through the store for a house-detective. A floorwalker elbowed his way through.

"What's it all about?" he demanded. Affairs like this in the store were *so* distressing.

"This man," Madeline's uncle poked a fat finger at the late shadow while his other pudgy hand stayed tight around a wrist, "tried to pick my pocket."

"You're crazy," yelled the sleuth. "Lemme go. I'm a detective."

His captor's head wagged sorrowfully.

"That makes it worse," he mourned.

The house-detective arrived. The party adjourned to the manager's office to thresh it out. The Crosston sleuth protested all the way that he was working on a case and that his present accuser was involved. He flashed his badge and raved, but it didn't gain anything until they had paraded at length before the manager.

After a while uncle conceded that he might have been mistaken. But he could have sworn he felt a hand in his pocket and the sleuth was the only person beside him. His recent prisoner bit at the atmosphere and raved all over again.

"Where's the girl?" he shouted. "Where did she go?"

"Girl?" Madeline Ruth's uncle raised his eyebrows in perfect arcs on his happy face.

"Y' know who I mean," snarled the sleuth. "Madeline Ruth."

"Oh," uncle was surprised. "I'd just left her a moment before. I don't know where she was going when she left here." Which, in a measure, was the truth.

The sleuth was mad and impolite. He made no effort to hide it.

"You're a liar."

A fat finger admonished him again.

"Let it go at that," the man before him beamed. He pulled out his watch. "Will you join me in a snifter?"

The sleuth snorted. Uncle didn't care. He knew that Madeline Ruth was on a train just pulling out of Grand Central.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADISON DECIDES.

MADELINE RUTH registered at the hotel Madison had mentioned in Chicago. For two days she waited, haunting the lobby on the watch for "John Armstrong." From early morning until late at night she was there, so that the clerks knew her down to the minutest detail of dress and look and gesture.

In the evening he came. She saw him before he reached the top of the steps to the front entrance. Swiftly she went to meet him. Her hand went to her lips for silence, but he could not wholly conceal his amazement.

"My God, Madeline"—his face grew white—"what are you doing here?"

Never saying a word she put her arm in his and turned him around. Under her guidance he went back down the steps.

"You shouldn't have come," he repeated.

"Why are you here?" she countered.

"I sent the word," he confessed, "because I thought—I hoped there might be—a line from you."

"And when you find me here instead of a letter," she chided, with an effort at frivolity, "you are disappointed!"

"No, no, Madeline. But there's no knowing what trouble it may bring you. What if I were caught now—where would you stand?"

They turned into Michigan Avenue Boulevard and walked north. In silence she considered his ill-fitting clothing. He had just bought it after washing off the grime of six days' travel on a freight-train.

Before her abrupt question he paused, startled at the intonation:

"Why don't you—give yourself up?"

He couldn't enlighten her.

"There are reasons," he answered vacantly, "why I shouldn't."

"Of course there are," she continued the attack, "but aren't there any why you *should*?"

Slowly his head shook. There was one great reason he knew, right by his side—Madeline Ruth. But even that was not enough.

"I—I wish you would." Her halting words puzzled him. "Couldn't you—clear yourself?"

Just what she was driving at did not appear clear to Madison. Again he made no reply. She let it go.

"And now?" she questioned.

"I don't know." His face clouded. "Now, you see, I'm broke."

Could he have seen her eyes he would have been even more amazed by the illumination in their depths. She actually seemed happy over his misfortune.

"You have no money at all?"

He caught the satisfaction in her words.

"About a dollar and a half," he said.

"You had—a lot, didn't you?" she insisted.

"Not so much," he remarked wearily.

"A few thousands. But I was robbed on the train. They don't care much what sort of men they hire—that's why they took me, I imagine. I got a clump on the head between St. Louis and here and—somebody got my belt."

While he met her eyes the gloom disappeared from his own.

There was a hole in it all somewhere; she could see that. But where? That was what she had to find out.

"I'd like to have a long talk with you," she said. "That is why I came to Chicago. There are one or two things I'd like to know. You trust me, John, don't you?"

"There isn't anything else to tell—or to do," he replied. "What do you want to know?"

She wheeled decisively.

"We can't stand here talking, nor can we talk where other folks are around. I'll get a car—I can borrow it from a friend. Will you wait for me?"

They were nearing Twenty-Second Street again, where her hotel was located.

"It wouldn't be advisable to go anywhere into any public place," she added. "Promise that you'll wait; walk up the avenue and I'll pick you up in half an hour. Go as far as Grant Park, then walk back; I'll drive along slowly, on the lookout for you."

Something under the surface of her proposal made itself felt on Madison. Greatly as he desired to avoid involving her further in his affairs, he was impelled to comply. "I'll wait, Madeline Ruth," he declared simply. Nodding briskly, she left him.

Going straight to her room in the hotel to get a warmer wrap, Madeline Ruth did what turned out to be a foolish thing. She telephoned from there. Calling a girl chum who had married and moved to Chicago, she asked the loan of an automobile. The other woman had a score of questions—how long had Madeline Ruth been in Chicago? why she hadn't gone out to the house to stay? and about Crosston.

"I'll tell you later," said Madeline. "About the car—I must have one right away, and I—I cannot hire. I don't want a chauffeur. It is necessary that I drive myself."

"Mystery," cried the young matron at the other end of the wire joyously. "You'll have to explain when you bring the car back. Of course you can have it. I'll have the man drive right down and if you don't need him you can send him home."

Madeline gave the name of the hotel and thanked her friend. Had she failed to get a machine there, there were only two other persons she knew well enough in Chicago to ask such a favor. That was one weight off her mind. In twenty minutes the auto arrived. Taking the wheel she drove up the boulevard. Her keen eye failed to see Madison and she became fearful that he had taken alarm. At the museum, up on the extreme of the park, she turned south again but perforce had to drive on the right hand, which gave her no view of the pedestrians on the park side of the way. She was disappointed. Yet she could not conceive that Madison had broken his word to wait; if he had, her faith was worthless.

Hugging the curb, she traveled northward again, watching every face that passed. The length of the park had almost been traversed again when she saw him. Instantly she came to a stop and pressed the horn. She was out of the car in a second and at his side.

"Come," she ordered him for the second time that evening.

Without speaking, he followed and got into the machine.

"We'll get out of this jam," she said, starting, "and you will tell me—things."

Close beside this girl, Madison was satisfied. If only he could go on through life like this. He admired the manner in which she moved through the constant stream of autos; the serenity with which she picked her course.

"You speak to me in riddles," he said at length.

A counter-question came instantly:

"What did you do with the rest of the money?"

That was the second time she had mentioned it.

"What money?"

"Why be evasive?" she asked.

Madison's eyes fixed on the side of her face. Her own were on the road, but he could see they were very serious.

"You were robbed," she added. "But not of the whole two hundred thousand. You could not have carried that much."

"Two hundred thousand!" Madison sat up. "What are you talking about, Madeline Ruth?"

His evident bewilderment gave her fresh satisfaction. Instead of answering she shot another bolt:

"Why"—she had to force herself to say it—"why did you kill Walter Fleming and—and the watchman?"

As though she had struck him, Madison shrank back.

"Wha-at?" he gasped.

There came a joyous singing in Madeline Ruth's heart. She blinked so that she might see where she was driving.

No longer was she afraid to ask questions. She repeated her words steadily.

"Why did you kill Walter Fleming and the watchman?"

Leaning his face close to hers, Madison spoke clearly.

"You're ahead of me on this, Madeline Ruth. Is Walter Fleming dead—and which watchman?"

Switching on the dash-light she thrust a bundle of newspaper clippings into his hand. Now and then as he read Madison uttered a gasp of horror.

"God Almighty," he raised his face to her at last. "Is that what I have been running away from?"

Hope and trust welled deep in her voice.

"Di-didn't you know?"

Reaching over he touched her hands.

"Look at me, Madeline Ruth," he commanded. She obeyed for an instant and what she saw in his eyes satisfied her as he was satisfied with what he found.

"I knew it," her words broke in a sob. "That's the reason I came and asked why you—didn't give yourself up."

Grim lines settled on Madison's face. It seemed that it had been chiseled in granite. When the girl shot another glance his eyes were like flint and stared straight ahead.

Taking a hand from the wheel she dropped it on his. His expression frightened her.

"John Madison," she whispered, "what are you thinking?"

"Of what is to come," he replied. "Stop the car, Madeline."

With pounding heart she obeyed. She was willing to let him take command.

"We're on Sheridan Road, past the city line," he told her. "Evanston is about a mile farther on."

He stepped from the car.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"You are going back, Madeline," he said, "and I am going on—" he pointed up the road.

"But—"

"There are no buts," his tone was positive. "It was bad enough that I should compromise you while I was fleeing as a— a thief, but as a murderer—"

"What are you going to do?" She was tremulous.

His features hardened again. He stepped to the side of the car that he might see her better.

"I'll give them a chance to send me to the chair for the murder of Walter Fleming and the watchman," he said evenly. "If they can't do it, then, Madeline Ruth, you and I will—"

The last of his speech was drowned in the sputtering of the engine as the girl threw in the reverse. A moment later the auto hovered, throbbing beside him, pointed toward Chicago.

"I knew you would, I knew it all the time," she cried half-hysterically. "And you and I—"

Like his, her words were lost in the drone when she stepped on the accelerator. As the machine shot away her arm flew backward and something dropped at his feet.

The auto's tail-light had faded into the darkness before John Madison stooped to see what had fallen. It was a roll of bills.

"You and I," he had said.

"You and I," she had said.

Facing a murder charge John Madison turned. He wasn't thinking of that; his thoughts were all on the girl who had seen the way as he saw it and had not argued. Whistling, he walked toward Evanston.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NET TIGHTENS.

CLOSE as he was to the metropolis, Chief Rainor of Crosston could not possibly escape playing the game for all it was worth. Wire-tapping was a serious item, but in this, his biggest case, the chief employed it. The idea came to him through an exposure a while back of incidents in the New York department which had raised a storm.

Madeline Ruth's was the wire on which Rainor cut in, of course. He did so immediately she returned with her denial that she knew any more about Madison's reputed suicide off the Monterey. Thirteen days it yielded nothing. At last the chief's listener got in on a talk.

The aunt who played companion to Madeline was responsible for this first telephone betrayal of the girl's movements. Two days after Madeline, with the aid of

her uncle, had evaded the Crosston detective, the aunt called that uncle by phone. She was worried and, had he been willing, the uncle would have admitted as much. Only his belief that Madeline Ruth could look after herself kept him from getting excited over her venture.

In this way did the aunt undo all the precautions Madeline had taken not to hold any conversation bearing on the case over the phone. Like Chief Rainor, she knew that wire-tapping was "being done" that season and she had guarded against it.

The talk that was recorded for Rainor's benefit, however, arose out of an anxious query from the aunt anent the whereabouts of Madeline.

"I'm getting skittish over that myself," her uncle said, his round face serious for the moment. "But," Rainor's man hung on the words, "between ourselves, from remarks she dropped, I think she's gone to Chicago."

Tearful pleadings followed on the aunt's side and soothing remarks on the uncle's, but they didn't interest Rainor. Still smarting under the defeat that had been slipped to his detective, he snatched at this lead. Chicago! Here was a fresh start, and he went to it.

The night that Madeline Ruth and Madison met in the Windy City, therefore, detectives were scouring it to find a girl on a description furnished from Crosston. Rainor had stated in his telegram that since she was under cover, she probably would not use her own name. A rapid canvass established that he was correct. But an hour after she intercepted Madison at the hotel, a detective drifted in with a word-picture of her.

On account of the long vigil she had kept in the lobby, the clerk had no hesitation in identifying Madeline Ruth. Topping that, the telephone-operator supplied the number she had called that night. That was the second time the telephone played her false.

Facing a man who flashed a police shield, Madeline's friend, from whom she had borrowed the car, trembled over the extent of the mystery into which she had dabbled. Fearfully, she gave the number of the auto. Which naturally caused a lookout of alarm

to be scattered for the machine known to be in the possession of Madeline Ruth.

A motorcycle patrolman picked it up as it went out Sheridan Road. He trailed it to the city line. The message had said merely to watch for the car and report its direction and who was in it. The motorcycle man called central office from his patrol station and announced the car containing a man and a woman, outbound from the city. Shortly afterward he telephoned that it was inbound with only a woman on board.

All of which combined to put Madeline Ruth in a queer and dangerous situation.

Weeks, the detective who identified Madeline at the hotel and got the auto number, was a new man at headquarters, recently graduated from precinct plain-clothes man. He was back in the bureau chatting with Franklin, an old-timer, when the motorcycle policeman made his first report. Franklin had shown a disposition to help Weeks and the new man leaned on him.

With the circular from Crosston before him, Weeks studied the face and description of Madison.

"Wish I'd got a glimpse at the bird in the car with her," he remarked.

Franklin grinned.

"Think it was Madison?"

"Well," Weeks became a very serious young detective, "it might have been."

"I shouldn't worry," Franklin advised dryly. "He'd hardly come into the open like that now. We know from New Orleans that he wasn't drowned." The New Orleans detective had "made" his man when too late, but the cry had been sent broadcast.

When the motorcycle cop reported again, Weeks became mildly wrought up. Why, he demanded, had this girl taken a man out of the city and left him there? Obvious, said Franklin, an argument and she shook him. Weeks couldn't see that. He was bound up in the idea that she had helped a fugitive get out of a danger zone, as Chicago was certain to prove if he stayed there any length of time.

"Say," he urged, "let's go after this."

"After what?" asked Franklin.

"This Madeline Ruth and the man," persisted Weeks, and he went into the dope that he had been rolling over in his mind.

The impression of his words on Franklin was not great, but they planted a germ.

"It wouldn't do any harm, I suppose," he said grudgingly at last. "But, hell, we can't bust in on her at this time of night just to ask who was riding with her. I guess it doesn't mean anything, and it's safe to let it go till morning. Meet me at eight."

The following morning therefore the two detectives called on Madeline Ruth. The arrival of the detectives so soon after Madison's newest flight shook her a little. It didn't seem possible that they knew anything but—

"We just want to check up again on this fellow Madison that you met on the ship, Miss Ruth," explained Franklin quietly. "You know, he was seen a week or so ago in New Orleans, and they think he headed North."

The mild and apparently unsuspecting words to some extent quieted the girl's fears, but instinctively she felt that there was something behind them.

"Anything that I can do?" she smiled and bowed.

Weeks stood back. He thought she could have stood more color. In her face he decided there was a hint of apprehension. That might account for her paleness; probably did, he told himself, and became more certain he had picked up that great opportunity after all.

Franklin spoke ponderously:

"Now miss, would you mind going over it all again? Just as a matter of helping us closer on description. Do you remember any—" he was frankly killing time so he might have longer to watch the flirting expression on her face, for Franklin too imagined there was a shadow of doubt there—"any trick in the way he talked or moved his hands or—or anything?"

"No; nothing," she said.

"We hoped you might," pursued the detective. "You see," he shot the words briskly, "we think he is in Chicago."

A quick intake of the breath came with a little chill to Madeline Ruth.

"In Chicago," she echoed. "Why—do you think that?"

Both noticed her start. Weeks cut in for the first time. He was at the side of her and his words came like a broadside:

"We got a good line on him last night."

Sheer pallor settled on the girl. Her head went round to face Weeks. She could not hide the tint of anxiety:

"And—you didn't catch him?"

"We're close up to him," said Franklin.

The confidence in his voice troubled her.

"But why should he come to Chicago?" She tried to make the remark casual.

Franklin leaned slightly toward her.

"We wondered that, too," he smiled slowly.

Madeline Ruth bit her lips. Was it possible that they were trying to trap her? It looked that way.

"I'm sorry I can't help you any further," she said, rising. "If you can think of any way I can do so, call any time."

The detectives got to their feet. They understood that she was dismissing them. There was no valid or legal reason for their encroaching further on her.

Weeks nudged Franklin and whispered as they moved to the door. His companion nodded. He was saving the bombshell for the psychological moment. It came as they were stepping out.

"By the way, Miss Ruth," Franklin smiled, but his voice was keen, "who was in the auto with you last night?"

Taken by surprise, Madeline Ruth stammered.

"Last night?"

The detective nodded.

"Oh," she recovered her self-possession, "that was the chauffeur."

Like a flash it came to Madeline Ruth that here was the pitfall. If they knew as much about her movements as he had just indicated, that she had gone in a motor with a man, they probably knew that he had not come back with her.

"Did he come back with you?"

"No," she replied. "He stayed in Evanston—on a mission for me."

"I see." Franklin turned away from her into the hall. "I'll let you know as soon as we get Madison. We'll want you to iden-

tify him. You can do that, all right, can't you?"

"Certainly," said the girl faintly. "You expect to—get him soon?"

"Any minute now, any minute," declared the detective cheerily. "Probably they've rounded him up while we've been here."

After they had gone Madeline Ruth wilted. She did not want Madison to be arrested, although, of course, it wouldn't make such a difference. She wanted him to surrender, as he had indicated his intention. That would be better; that was what she desired of him if only to justify her faith.

It struck Madeline Ruth that she had probably gotten herself into trouble. She had placed herself in the position of an accessory after the fact in aiding the escape of Madison. She remembered how lightly she had contemplated that possibility just before he dived off the Monterey. Even now she was not vastly concerned over it. Her thoughts were flying to him.

Meantime Franklin and Weeks were regarding each other with some satisfaction.

"She was lying," exclaimed Weeks. "D'y' suppose she knows anything?"

"She was lying in spots anyhow," Franklin agreed. "Wait until we find out about the chauffeur."

Quickly they got in touch with the owner of the auto and found that Madeline had not taken the chauffeur with her.

The detectives exchanged glances. The same thought was in their minds. It had not been the man Weeks had seen in the machine that she left at Evanston.

"Come on, Weeks," said Franklin. "Let's make a stab at it. I begin to think you've hit something."

Weeks was elated. So was Franklin, but his joy didn't measure up to that of his companion who was butting right into a big thing; though it was only a few days since he had been chasing petty jobs in a precinct.

"We'd better talk it over with the chief," advised Franklin, "before we go any further."

The younger detective wanted to push right on. He couldn't see why they should let any others in on the deal. In fact, he almost regretted giving Franklin a share in the glory which was apparently in sight.

But Franklin had his way and they made the trip to headquarters. The chief of detectives listened to their dope with widening eyes.

"I'll shoot out a message now," he said, "while you go see the girl again. Get in touch with me quick if she comes across with anything. But, Franklin, handle her with gloves, for she's away up among folks and has friends."

"That's all right," asserted Franklin. "We won't get rough."

CHAPTER X.

TRAPPED.

THE return of the detectives within a couple of hours frightened Madeline Ruth. The hunt was getting too near to be comfortable. She presented a calm exterior, determined to fence with them and seek to fathom how much they knew. They gave her little chance.

Franklin "stabbed" right at the point. It was a blind play, but he hoped to jar her into some unguarded exclamation by his sudden attack.

Her eyes were large when she received the detectives. They dilated with an irrepressible dread at the first words hurled at her:

"Where did you leave Madison last night?"

By an effort she choked back a cry and maintained her composure. She had expected a grilling, but nothing so staggering as that.

"Leave him," she evaded and managed to laugh lightly. "I don't understand what you mean."

The detectives eyed her closely. Her excitement was plain. Franklin made the most of what he considered his advantage.

"You drove him out of town in your car. Where did he go?"

Madeline Ruth sought refuge in indignation.

"Your insinuation, sir, is not only absurd, but it is rude."

"You took a man out of the city in an automobile," insisted Franklin, "and did not bring him back. You told us he was

your chauffeur. He was not. You have no chauffeur. What about it?"

She had anticipated that, but had found no means of meeting the challenge. The detectives noted her silence and pressed the issue. Franklin made an attempt to scare her.

"You understand that it is a crime to help a fugitive from justice? You know that you can be sent away for that? In a murder case it means a long term."

The girl realized the tight place she was in, but doggedly refused to answer.

"Why did you lie to us about your companion last night?" fired Weeks.

"Your impertinence is unlimited, sir," she said angrily. "I will thank you to leave my apartment."

Weeks became uneasy, but Franklin held his ground.

"We're not going till you tell us what you know," he asserted.

"You are going now," she said.

The detective's eyes narrowed and he took a step toward her.

"If we do, Miss Ruth," his voice grew harsh, "you go with us."

With a gasp she shrank away. Jail—she, Madeline Ruth, in jail. The prospect appalled her, but she thought it was a bluff.

"It is useless to continue this discussion," she stood up, facing the men. She pointed to the door. "That is the way out."

"See here, miss," Franklin said, "you are only getting yourself into trouble. Why not help us out and we'll forget you lied about it? We won't lock you up."

Out of this appeal for her assistance, Madeline Ruth found an atom of comfort. They had not yet located Madison. He still had a chance of getting away. They were not even in close contact with him. If they were, why should they be so anxious for aid? She could not resist gloating in a quiet way.

"But," her eyebrows went up mockingly, "you said he was as good as arrested. Why offer me immunity for my help?"

The detective saw that he had made a mistake. He lost his temper.

"He is. We'll have him in no time. And here's your last chance. Where did you leave Madison?"

A tinge of scorn came into the girl's face. They were trying to browbeat her. She laughed.

"I have nothing to tell you," she said clearly. "I did not leave John Madison anywhere. I did not see him."

Franklin walked over close beside her.

"I said it was your last chance. Get on your coat and come along."

The girl trembled, but she held her smile.

"Am I under arrest?"

"Not exactly. That depends on yourself. If you talk you needn't come."

"And if I refuse to go?"

"That's easy. Then you *will* be under arrest."

Grasping a chair she hid the quivering of her hands.

"On what charge?" she asked steadily.

Franklin looked at her in admiration he could not conceal.

"You're game, all right, but it doesn't get you anything. The charge will be aiding and abetting a murderer."

Hot blood suffused her face as she thrust it forward.

"He is not," she declared vehemently.

"Not what?" The detective snatched at her denial as the clincher on his suspicion. Up to now he had been largely bluffing.

"He is not a—murderer," the girl repeated defiantly.

"How do you know? You said you didn't know him?"

Madeline Ruth saw that she had said too much. Her chin shut with a snap.

For several minutes they stared at one another without speaking. Finally Franklin moved impatiently.

"How about it?" he asked again.

The girl met his gaze.

"That appears to be—to be up to you."

"Right." Franklin nodded to Weeks.

"Phone the chief that we're coming in—with a prisoner. Get your coat, Miss Ruth. I'll call a car."

Though what he had just read about the slaying of Walter Fleming and the bank watchman was fresh in his mind, as also was his own peril, John Madison was light-hearted when he walked into Evanston.

Murder! He was wanted for murder!

That changed the complexion of things. The cloud of a larceny charge was bad enough, but this latest revelation was overwhelming.

Grimly he looked into the future. He could see where now he would *have* to tell a certain matter, would even have to cast a blot on the name of a dead man.

While trudging along the road from where Madeline Ruth had left him, he had made his plans. From Evanston he got a train to Milwaukee. There he connected with a car ferry in the early morning and crossed Lake Michigan to Grand Haven. By noon he was entering Detroit, riding on the money Madeline had thrown to him.

At Detroit he intended to take a boat down the lake to Buffalo and from there a train to Crosston. He figured that he would not come under as many eyes on a boat as he would traveling by train with detectives hanging around the big stations he would pass through.

There would be no boat for Buffalo until late afternoon. He went to a hotel to pass the hours of waiting. Perhaps he could get a nap, for he was becoming tired.

At the hotel news-stand he bought the afternoon papers and went at once to his room. He did not expect to find anything about himself in print. Far less did he expect to see anything about Madeline Ruth.

But there it was, glaring out at him from the first page. His amazement was so great that for a spell he could not read. Arrested—Madeline Ruth seized as an accessory after the fact in the Crosston murder!

With thumping pulse he composed himself to read. It was a good story, this revival of an unsolved murder mystery through the arrest of a society girl. That the fugitive had been believed a suicide at sea until a few days ago when he was recognized in New Orleans, gave it another outstanding angle. His arrest, the police confidently stated, was only an affair of hours.

Not if Madison knew it. He abandoned his idea of sleeping, but kept to his plan to remain in the hotel.

How could he obtain the release of Madeline Ruth? That was his first problem. He cursed himself for having subjected her to danger by being in his company at all. He

should have broken away as soon as he met her.

If he gave himself up at once it might gain her freedom. He did not want to be arrested here. He had a different program.

Calling for stationery he wrote a few words directed to the superintendent of police in Chicago. Then he put the note in an envelope with a dollar bill and addressed it to the Western Union Telegraph Company at Detroit, with instruction to send the telegram at once. He wanted to be out of the city before the wire was filed, for he had signed his name to it.

On the way to the boat he dropped the letter in a mail-box. It would be delivered in a couple of hours he reckoned. That meant it would reach Chicago before eight o'clock that night. By then he would be well started on his way down the lake.

Aboard ship he kept to his stateroom and, while he thought of the stress before him, the picture of Madeline Ruth brightened his eyes. How he was going to proceed at Crosston, for he had determined to return there, he was not sure. He was putting his head into a noose, he understood, but he had no fear of that.

Next day the big lake vessel steamed through the breakwall at Buffalo and up the narrow harbor. On the dock he saw a newsboy and chafed until the boat had tied up and he could get ashore. Handing the boy a coin he took the afternoon papers and quickly scanned them. His own picture and that of Madeline Ruth stared from two of the front pages. The headline told him that the girl still was being held in Chicago and that his own arrest continued to be "imminent."

How near he always seemed to be to arrest made him smile. When he read, however, that Madeline Ruth had been refused bail, despite the offer of a large sum by her wealthy and influential friends, his face again clouded. He glowed when he saw that she still stoutly insisted that she knew nothing of him.

His telegram to the Chicago police urging them to let Madeline go was quoted. It was the latest ground for "imminent" his capture; it had pointed the way he had gone.

The pictures fascinated him. He liked the way they were laid out in one of the papers—face to face, with Madeline Ruth smiling. He hoped it was prophetic. His own features cheered. Still standing on the dock he held the paper at arm's length to enjoy the effect.

A hand touched his arm. The paper crushed in the spasmodic contraction of his hands. His head came round with a jerk to the man standing beside him.

"How are you, Madison?" asked his accoster amiably. "That's a good picture of you, too. Better than we got."

Madison looked down at the hand on his arm, then his gaze roved over the other. The detective's eyes twinkled.

"You won't start anything?" he questioned.

"What's the use?" Madison spoke for the first time. "Of course not; shall we go?"

"We might as well ride." The detective remained pleasant. Why shouldn't he be? Hadn't he made a good pick-up? He indicated a taxi with his head. "Let's get into it."

Passengers off the boat waiting for their baggage watched the tableau with interest. Madison was standing with the crumpled paper still in his half-outstretched hands as though frozen in his tracks, the other man lightly holding him. One of them recognized Madison from the newspaper pictures and they crowded around for a closer sight of the prisoner in this sensational case.

In a way, Madison was relieved that it was over. This was not the way he had mapped it, but no matter. Now he could go to the front for Madeline Ruth.

He nodded to his captor and they got into the taxi. It started at once on the order:

"Police headquarters."

CHAPTER XI.

MADISON WINS A POINT.

MADISON suggested that the Buffalo police start him for Crosston without delay. He offered to waive the formality of a court hearing. Now that

affairs had reached a climax he was more anxious than ever to put to the test an idea that had been looming greater and greater since his talk with Madeline Ruth.

Chief Rainor of Crosston, however, had another plan. For thirty hours he had been joyously swelling over the news of the arrest of Madeline Ruth. There was justification for him. The tangible evidence of the fact that Madison was in Detroit added to his jubilation. The telegram that he was in custody crowned everything.

The vision of a triumphant entry into Crosston with his prisoner was coming true. He wired Buffalo to hold Madison until he arrived. And he took the first train out of New York.

Chief among Madison's troubles now was the detention of Madeline Ruth. He asked the Buffalo police officers if she couldn't be released.

"She tried to help me only because she knew I was on the way to Crosston to surrender," he explained.

"That's up to Rainor and Chicago," they told him.

He had them wire the Windy City, and the word came back that by request of the Crosston police she still was being held without bail.

Madison fretted and attempted to get in touch with Rainor by telegraph, but the chief already had started for Buffalo.

"Tell you what," the Buffalo detective chief advised him. "Send word for her to waive extradition. If you say you can clear her part of it, that will save time."

"What do you mean?"

"She'll be taken to Crosston, anyway," the detective said, "but she might fight and delay her removal. If you can help her out the sooner she gets to Crosston the better."

The prospect of seeing Madeline soon again appealed greatly to Madison. He wrote a message urging her, since they would not accept bond, to tell her willingness to be extradited to New York State. Ordinarily the Chicago authorities would wait for some one to be sent for her. If she could arrange it with them to provide an escort she could start that night. The answer from Madeline stated that she was

leaving at once. Within a couple of hours she was on the way to Crosston, accompanied by a police matron and a detective.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Chief Rainor reached Buffalo. Without even waiting for breakfast he made straight for police headquarters.

When the chief entered, Madison was in the detective bureau stretching his legs after a night in a cramped cell. He greeted Rainor cordially and the chief made no effort to hide his pleasure at the meeting.

"So it was a frame-up between you and the girl?" He chuckled over the outcome of his pet theory. "I thought so."

Madison hadn't the least conception of what Rainor meant. His look showed it.

"By the way, chief," the sergeant in charge of the bureau interrupted, "the girl is on her way to your town now."

"How's that?"

Rainor's joy increased. The only flaw lay in that he wasn't able to take Madeline and Madison back together. However, if she was going without a contest, that was good enough.

"When do we start?" asked Madison.

"After a while," replied Rainor. "No hurry just now."

He had figured that out. If he began the return journey at once it would be dark when he reached Crosston. By remaining in Buffalo till evening he could get home in daylight. And he much preferred to do so because then everybody would see him and none of the victory would be lost.

"Where's the money, Madison?" he questioned.

"We'll get to that later," said Madison shortly.

In his heart the chief didn't care if the money never was recovered; still, if he could get it, it would add another wreath.

"It might be easier for you if you gave that up," he wheedled. The detectives gathered round smiled at the idea of anything he might do helping a man accused of murder in the first degree; for while the killing of Walter Fleming, the bank president, might have been done in anger, the fatal attack on the watchman certainly had been premeditated.

"Wait till we get home," Madison lin-

gered an instant on the word, "and we'll go into all that. Maybe I'll do more for you than tell where the money is—or was."

"What d'you mean?" Chief Rainor wasn't passing up any bets.

"Never mind just now." Madison smiled enigmatically. "You should have found out long ago."

The intimation that there was something he had not uncovered, riled the chief.

"I found you, didn't I?" he snapped. "And, by jinks, you're going to the chair."

Far into the night Madison and Chief Rainor talked in their stateroom on the speeding train. The chief had slept that afternoon in preparation for a night of wakefulness guarding the prisoner.

Madison wanted to talk and showed no sign of slumbering. He was manacled but bore that cheerfully.

At first the police officer listened tolerantly. He was willing enough to hear Madison; the prisoner might say something that would prove of value. That was the hope foremost in Chief Rainor's head while he settled down expecting maybe some protestation of innocence.

His first surprise came when Madison made no remark about his innocence. The only pointer he gave on that score was a confidence that was distantly disturbing.

After the prisoner had spoken a little while, Rainor began to take real notice. The cigar which he had been pulling at with rare gusto went dead. His face sobered from its satisfied grin. When he felt tempted to interrupt his prisoner he stifled the desire.

On the other hand, Madison could see that his recital was biting deep. The chief no longer scoffed. And, like Rainor, Madison's face took on an agate cast. The metallic clanging of the handcuffs on his wrists as he jabbed one hand into the other to emphasize his statements seemed unnaturally loud.

They were past Albany and rattling down the side of the Hudson in the early morning when Chief Rainor made his last stand. Cold beads of sweat were on his forehead through contemplation of the disaster that might yet attend his case.

Why not let well enough alone and stand on the man he had? He argued with himself that he was a fool to pay any heed to Madison. It was only natural that any one facing a charge of murder in the first degree would offer some wild tale to pull himself free. Yet there was a convincing ring to his prisoner's words. He could not deny that. Nevertheless Rainor put up a fight against his own conscience.

"Suppose that were all true, Madison, which I can't concede, how would you ever prove it?"

"Isn't that your job, chief?" asked Madison quietly.

That was the second time he had hinted at what Rainor should do and it peeved the chief.

"I've done my end," he rejoined. "I've got you. And, Madison, if you have anything like you say you have, it's up to you to make it show."

Madison crushed a hot retort on the tip of his tongue and forced a smile. He wanted to keep in the good graces of the chief.

"Of course it is," he remarked pleasantly, "but don't you see the greater possibility? What if I beat you—what if you don't convict me? I don't believe you will. Where do you stand then?"

Struggling against the points that Madison had been hammering home, Rainor laughed—but there was a falseness in his mirth.

"I'm not worrying about that, young fellow," he said.

Sizing him up coldly, Madison could see that the police chief was talking to give himself courage.

"What's the use of backing and filling like this?" he demanded. His eyes held Rainor's. "I've told you a whole lot that you didn't know—that you never would have known. If we get together and go through with things as they apparently stand now, I'm sure we can get a fast wind-up." He stopped to let his words sink in. "It's up to you, chief."

Mile after mile was covered by the rushing train while Rainor sat in thought. He lit his cigar half a dozen times but he was too preoccupied to keep it going.

Watching the other man, Madison felt

that he had won—that he would win. He understood what a problem he had put up to Rainor, how he had smashed at the foundation of the castle the policeman had built.

To his mind it was only a question of whether Rainor decided to help him or remain against him.

At length he repeated his challenge:

"It's up to you, chief."

"Wait—wait a minute."

Rainor was thinking again of the sensation he would create leading Madison as a prisoner from the railroad station at Crosston to a cell. He would have that pleasure, anyhow, that was true, but there would be an emptiness about it. Later he would have to square himself if the greater coup took place. Meantime he would merely be playing a part.

New York City was only a few miles away when he announced acceptance of Madison's proposition.

"I'm doing this just to give you a chance," he said, at the same time reluctant and eager. "Tell me again just how it is to go."

Madison spoke rapidly, earnestly.

"What about the girl?" he was asked.

"She's got to be let out on bail first thing on her arrival," Madison dictated. He smiled at Rainor's gesture of dissent and added, "She won't run away. You can put somebody to watch her if you like."

"It isn't that," grunted the chief. "But it 'll look funny, won't it, turning her loose?"

"Never mind that," Madison consoled.

"Unless I miss my guess, you won't have to keep a string on her for long."

Without comment, Chief Rainor took the handcuffs off Madison as the train entered Grand Central station.

"You won't need these," he said gruffly.

"If you run, I can yell—there's folks enough around to hold you."

Stretching himself in the joy of free movement, Madison put a hand on the chief's shoulder.

"You won't regret it," he said. "There's going to be action from now on, and after having been out of it so long, believe me, I'm going to be in it."

Walking through the concourse of that terminal to get a local to Crosston, the two men never would have been taken for policeman and prisoner. Their bearing was grave, that was all.

There was no one that they knew on the train at that hour of the morning, but the little town on the Hudson had word of their coming and was out to greet them.

Fallon, the last man to see Madison leave Crosston, was among the first to see his return. While Madison and Rainor made for an automobile to take them to police headquarters the bank examiner pressed close.

"I want to talk with Madison, if I may," he told Rainor. "Will it be all right?"

The chief nodded.

"Later on," he said.

Fallon turned to Madison and held out his hand.

"Any particular lawyer you want, John?" he asked.

The show of friendship puzzled Madison. It was odd, to say the least, under the circumstances. He smiled to cover his embarrassment.

"Not yet, Fallon. Thanks. I—I'll let you know."

"Come on," cut in Chief Rainor; "let's go."

They hustled into an auto and were starting when Fallon leaned forward.

"Madeline Ruth is here," he exclaimed; "she got in last night."

The car was gone before he could see the illumination the information brought to Madison's face. Rainor observed it, however, and even he was touched by the glamor of romance.

With a jolt the machine stopped in front of police headquarters. Rainor and Madison were only half up the steps when a girl appeared at the top. In a bound Madison reached her and imprisoned both her hands. Rainor herded the two inside.

"How d'you come to be running around?" he asked Madeline Ruth not unkindly. "Aren't you locked up?"

An instant she showered on him a flush of the happiness that made her so radiant.

"No," she said, "but I'm still a prisoner. A writ helped me get bail."

Then she forgot Rainor's existence.

"Fair enough," he conceded and his admiration at the sight of her was large. "Now, Madison, you get into my office and I'll call the others."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEADLOCK.

ON an urgent invitation from the police chief, Hugh Cowles, now president of the Crosston Commercial Bank, went to headquarters. There he continued to plead to be excused.

"I'm all unstrung," he said. "Since they got this—this dog, I haven't slept—not for two days. I'd rather—put off looking at him until later."

His appearance bore out the words. He looked as though he never had slept, so that his habitually fallen eyelids were more than even drawn. His thin lips, too, were accentuated in a straight line with hardly a vestige of color.

"It's hard, you know," he went on when the chief insisted upon his presence, "to sit calmly beside the—the murderer of your wife's father when every moment you see how the—the crime has shattered her."

"I think it 'll be better to have you there," reiterated Rainor. He tapped the other man confidentially on the chest. "Perhaps the influence of your being on hand will make him talk. You never can tell."

Cowles chewed nervously at a cigarette and no sooner had he spat the mushy tobacco out than another had taken its place.

"Fallon will be here in a few minutes," Rainor ran on, "and we'll get to work."

"What's he got to do with it?" The query came quickly from Cowles.

"Oh," the reply was noncommittal, "he had a talk with Madison, you remember, right after it happened, and of course he handled the investigation of the bank."

Further talk was shut off by the arrival of the bank examiner. He nodded briskly at Cowles but didn't speak. Fallon was still working at the Commercial Bank.

Rainor placed a chair on the opposite side of his desk, one to the side of the desk,

and another at his own elbow. He pressed a buzzer and told the policeman who responded to bring in Madison.

Cowles's eyes flew wide open when Madison paused in the doorway. The prisoner's jaw was molded harshly and his eyes glinted. He had had clothes sent round and again looked like his old self.

Cowles might have been hypnotized so steadily did he hold the staring pose. His shoulders were hunched slightly and his head pulled back. One hand tangled and untangled his watch chain while the fingers of the other wreathed back and forth digging the nails into the thumb.

It couldn't have been more than half a minute that Madison stood there, but in the surcharged atmosphere the time was endless. Never once did he take his glance off Cowles until Rainor ordered him to sit at the far side of the desk.

"You sit here," he said to Cowles, indicating the chair at his elbow, "and, you, Fallon, over there beside Madison."

When they had settled down, Rainor went to a safe in the corner and brought out a bulky envelope and a long thin package. From the latter he produced the brass ruler with which Walter Fleming and the bank watchman had been slain.

With frank curiosity Madison leaned forward and picked it up. The dried blood and a few hairs still adhered to it. Fallon shuddered a little at the weapon that had ended the lives of two men, but he also evinced interest in handling and examining it. Cowles shrank from touching it.

Rainor handed a magnifying-glass to Fallon and explained:

"You can see the streaks where our friend here," he nodded at Madison, "wiped it carefully before he took it up. Why did you do that?"

"Thought it would be safer," said the prisoner callously. He was speaking for effect.

Fallon looked up in surprise. His faith was a trifle shaken by the heartless manner in which Madison had spoken. For the second time Cowles's eyes popped. He stirred in the chair and more intently watched Madison.

"Go ahead, John." The chief became

easily familiar. "Start at the beginning and tell us all about it."

Carefully Madison lit a cigar from the box offered by Rainor. Lolling back with legs crossed he blew rings slowly, reaching forward to stab a finger through them as they wafted upward. The chief likewise sat smoking, content to await Madison's pleasure.

The protracted silence, however, coupled with what he could not help but believe was an impending confession from Madison, put Fallon on edge. It was so different from what he had expected. His hand began to tingle at the recollection that it had been extended to Madison in friendship so recently.

On Cowles the effect was similar. His nerves jumped and the *hrmp hhh!* as Fallon cleared his throat made him start.

Finally Madison quit making his smoke-rings and embraced the three men with a ghost of a grin. His words came in a quiet conversational way.

"I had been planning that getaway for days," he said. "It was simple enough. The only thing that almost got me was the deathly quiet"—he harped on that—"the fearful silence in the bank when—I went out."

He squinted around and his eyes fastened on Cowles. The new president of the Commercial Bank, elevated to that place through murder, sat motionless and dry-lipped, his face gray and masked.

Without interruption, Madison told of his plunge off the steamship, his night at sea, and ultimate rescue when he was on the point of giving up. He stretched out the story of his trip to and from the Azores, his adventure in New Orleans, and second meeting with Madeline Ruth which led to his capture.

"And here I am," he wound up. "The next thing, I suppose, is—the electric chair!"

"But, John," the hushed tone was Fallon's, "why did you—kill him?"

Like a bolt Madison stood up. The lassitude which apparently had gripped him was cast aside.

"I did not," he said vigorously. His glance swung back to Cowles. "Ask

Cowles what happened—*after I left the bank.*"

With sagging face, Cowles huddled there, dumb. Then he pulled himself together. His voice came cracked:

"How do I know? I—wasn't there!"

Madison ignored him. He addressed Rainor and Fallon:

"This is the part that I dislike, but it is necessary. You found my check for a hundred thousand dollars, and, you, Fallon, naturally discovered that I apparently had already swindled the bank out of probably a quarter million. That looked like restitution—as we intended it should.

"Walter Fleming had told me several days previous that he had taken the half-million and could not make good. It had gone to Wall Street, he said. I was fond of the old man. He had welcomed me when I came to Crosston and made me feel at home when a home was what I wanted. You know that, Fallon—and you know how he saved me from sinking almost all my money in that automobile factory whose promoters went to jail because it never materialized, soon after I came here.

"I thought of that—if it hadn't been for Walter Fleming I'd have been stripped about clean, long ago. I'd have had to begin again then. Why couldn't I do so now? He couldn't. Besides, apart from what he had done for me, he had family ties and a long-established place in the community. I had a place, too, but I had no family."

He paused and smiled wryly. They heard Cowles's teeth chatter and his raspy breathing.

"It sounds stagy and all that," resumed Madison, "and I confess that I was sorry very soon afterward. But that's the way it appealed to me at the time. The old man seemed so absolutely broken. I—I put it up to him and after a long argument convinced him to let me take it off his shoulders. That was the day before he and Cowles and myself met in the bank—the day I went away and Fleming was killed.

"We talked over the final details at that meeting. I had asked how much he could scrape together and that Saturday, the last time I saw him, he told me eighty thousand

dollars. That was how I came to give up my money—I didn't think the bank could stand such a loss and anyhow the cash had to be there when the examiners came. So I turned over the draft and the check for the three hundred thousand dollars and left it to him to fix the books somehow. The examiners who were to be called in would find only about a hundred thousand short and that could be put on me. I was to have time to get away and, if ever he could, Walter Fleming was to repay me. Also, he proposed that in his will he would leave a full confession so that I might return if I wished. The worst they could do would be to charge me with compounding a felony."

Shakily Cowles got to his feet. He stretched a wavering finger at Madison while his other hand rested on the edge of the desk for support.

"You're not going to listen to that," he voiced shrilly to Rainor. "He's been figuring out how he can—"

The opening of the door caused him to stop and spin around. Madeline Ruth was standing there. Her face was brilliant as she looked at Madison and his shone back. But when she transferred her glance to Cowles she became grave. The story that Madison was telling he had told to her just before the start of this session. She understood that he was far from being out of the woods.

Chief Rainor made no protest when she entered. Fallon was glad of her presence, because it was she who had bolstered up his latent belief in Madison. Hoping that she could do so, he had called on her with her uncle to arrange for counsel as soon as she arrived in town the night before.

The chief got up and drew forward a chair for Madeline. While she slowly crossed the room her eyes never left Cowles.

Cowles had turned as on a pivot to follow her and she could see the glitter under his close-drawn lids. She was seating herself when Cowles again broke out:

"She's in on it, too." His head bent forward and with new courage he sneered, "You're letting a woman put it over on you, Rainor. I'll see about that. You'll

come up on charges—letting a prisoner's, a murderer's woman—"

He never finished the sentence. Like a flame Madison rose and stepped forward. The back of his open hand flipped Cowles hard on the open mouth.

"Enough from you," he said menacingly. "Keep your mouth shut and sit down."

Rainor and Fallon were up to step between the men, but there was no need. Wiping a dribble of blood from his split lips, Cowles sank down.

"You'll—"

"Another word, Cowles," Madison's tone was ominous in its restraint, "and I'll pound you to a jelly."

Cowles shot a vicious look at Madeline Ruth. Her face was glowing and her hands were clenched menacingly.

"Put handcuffs on that man, Rainor." Cowles was subdued but still fighting. "Lock him up before he—he kills somebody else."

Madison laughed at him.

"You're good, Cowles. But—I'm not going to kill you—the State will do that far better."

Gnawing his nails, Cowles sat without making response.

The chief resumed his seat and waved Madison and Fallon to theirs.

"Go on, John," he said quietly. "Now tell us who you left in the bank."

Cowles shifted uneasily and made another protest.

"You can't believe—"

Madison silenced him.

"Walter Fleming and Hugh Cowles were there in the president's office," he declared. His gaze was fearless and he held his shoulders erect. "I left Walter Fleming and Cowles together. I didn't see the watchman."

"It's a lie," screamed Cowles. "You're a liar, Madison. I was home—home all afternoon. They saw you leave the bank with the bag of money. They saw—"

"Shut up!" interjected Rainor ungenitly. "How are you going to prove it, Madison?"

A shadow flickered on Madison's countenance. He got up again and walked around the room.

In the pregnant quiet while they waited for his answer, Madeline Ruth toyed with a trifle on the chief's desk. She said nothing, but even Cowles noticed her confident air.

"Somebody must have seen him go out of the bank," said Madison desperately, halting and thumping one fist into the other.

Realizing the dilemma his accuser was in, Cowles got back his nerve. His lips, swollen where Madison's knuckles had rapped them, curled in a jeer.

"Maybe you could buy some witnesses with the money you stole," he suggested.

The silence became heavy again. Rainor watched Cowles narrowly. On a choice between Madison and Cowles as the guilty man he would rather have Cowles. But there was a circumstantial case against Madison and nothing but his word against Cowles. It might well be that he, as Cowles insisted, was trying to involve another because his own game was up.

Fallon offered help:

"Can I ask a question, chief?"

"Sure. Anybody that can say anything about this can talk his head off."

The bank examiner addressed Cowles.

"How is it," he began, "that your own account at the Commercial Bank—through which a lot of doubtful paper appears to have gone—shows signs of having been doctored?"

This fresh accusation stunned Cowles. Then he bristled and sputtered:

"That's a lie, too. You're—"

"If it's a lie, Cowles, you'll have a chance to show that in court," warned Fallon. "I was about ready to ask an explanation. This other affair only hastened it."

The police chief made no attempt to conceal his surprise at this turn. In Madison it awoke a new hope. He partly understood now the friendly attitude exhibited by Fallon.

Cowles indignantly arose.

"I'm not going to stay here to be insulted any longer by crooks," he grated. Picking up his hat he made for the door. A step from it he was brought up by Fallon speaking. The power gave out of his knees and his heart almost stopped.

The bank examiner was demanding his arrest.

Cowles tried to turn his head but could not. A ringing in his ears made the next words seem as from a distance.

"Here's the warrant," Fallon was speaking. "I swore it out this morning."

The chief's chair scraped off the rug as he got up. The sound galvanized Cowles to life.

He had the door half open before Rainor could leap upon him. The door was hung inward. Under the combined weight of the two men it crashed shut on Cowles's wrist.

A shriek of agony burst from him. Madeline Ruth cried out in horror. Madison gritted his teeth to restrain the exclamation, and Fallon's face blanched. They had heard the bones of Cowles's arm crunch, and his whimpering screams were echoing through the building.

Rainor seated his latest prisoner and instructed one of the policemen who ran in to get a doctor. The arm hung limp in Cowles's lap. The chief produced whisky and gave it to the fainting man. The physical pain had broken Cowles down.

Ignoring his suffering, in fact rather counting upon it to heighten the shock she aimed at, Madeline Ruth cut in suddenly:

"My aunt saw Mr. Cowles leave the bank."

Rage and misery distorted his features. He struggled for speech.

"What-at?" chorused Rainor and Fallon.

"My aunt," repeated Madeline, "saw him walking from the alley that runs alongside the Commercial Bank. He—came out on the back street."

"A lie—another lie," shrieked Cowles. He stood up, holding his injured arm. "I was home that day, I tell you—I went motoring at night."

Relentlessly the girl went after him:

"Where were you at eight o'clock?"

"Out in the car." He damned her and turned to Rainor, "Ask my wife!"

While he writhed in pain, the aforetime treasurer and now president of the Commercial Bank did not delay in procuring counsel. Insisting that he required hospi-

tal attention for his mangled arm, the lawyers offered bail.

After a talk with Fallon, Madison, and Madeline Ruth, the police chief refused. He already had two surgeons there, he pointed out, and Cowles might call as many as he pleased.

The lawyers threatened to sue out a writ of habeas corpus. Another consultation, and the chief told them to go ahead.

"I'll fight it as an examiner for the State Banking Department," Fallon assured him.

Madeline Ruth took Madison's hand. She smiled but her face was serious.

"I'm gambling everything on this," she whispered. "I have another card if—" She looked anxiously at the clock and did not finish.

The set of Madison's features relaxed. His other hand closed over hers. He had to pull out of this, he told himself—for his own sake and for Madeline Ruth's. He looked over at Cowles who lay on a couch the chief had brought in from the matron's room. His arm bandaged and in splints, Cowles lay whispering with his lawyers. Intense pain was written in every line, his teeth gritted between words and his uninjured hand twitched.

One of Cowles's lawyers walked over to the chief belligerently.

"Our client demands proper medical care," he proclaimed with outthrust jaw. "You can send him to a hospital under arrest with a man to guard him."

Chief Rainor's head moved negatively.

"Nothing doing," he said.

"We'll get him to a hospital through the courts," the lawyer threatened.

"Fair enough," Rainor conceded. "Go see the courts."

He nodded to Madeline Ruth and she left the room.

From Cowles's corner came a groan. His head sagged weakly to one side. The doctor again applied the hypodermic, then addressed Rainor.

"We should take this man to a hospital," he said. "Won't you consent to his removal? He is suffering terribly."

Rocking on his feet in the middle of the room, Rainor surveyed the speaker, Cowles,

and the remaining lawyer. With a flourish he could not withhold, the chief put a cigar into the corner of his mouth and rolled it across his lips.

"We're pretty near ready, doc," he nodded. "Just a few more minutes and it'll be O. K."

The words attracted Cowles. He raised himself on an elbow, though the effort racked him, and looked around. Half an hour dragged along.

"Let me go, Rainor," he pleaded huskily. "I can't stand it any longer."

His nerve was going, his strength was done.

"Give him something, doc," ordered Rainor. "How bad is he?"

The doctor administered a stimulant and confronted the chief.

"He can't stand it much longer," he said.

"He won't have to," retorted Rainor. "One more jolt for him, that's all."

The door burst open and Cowles's other lawyer rushed in. He shook a paper under the chief's nose.

"You're served," he shouted. "The judge is waiting. Here's a writ of habeas corpus returnable at once."

For the second time Cowles eased himself up with dreadful courage. His hollow eyes opened and stayed that way in striking contrast to their customary droop. In their watery depths there seemed to be a faint hope amid a sea of despondency.

"We won't keep that judge waiting," the words rolled pleasantly off Rainor's tongue. "But things have changed since you went away. We'll all go right along with Cowles—and he is charged with murder in the first degree for the killing of Walter Fleming and William King. Now get him out."

With a supreme effort Cowles hoisted himself to his feet. His lawyers stood gaping, momentarily at a loss. This was more than they had bargained for.

Madison's arm went around Madeline Ruth. Her hair brushed his face. Fallon's hand sought Madison's, but he had to grasp one which enfolded the fingers of the girl. Chief Rainor weaved back and forth on heel and toe, smiling contentedly.

"It's a frame-up—" Cowles's voice was weak.

He was swaying and his eyes were blazing. His chin sank into his breast and he would have fallen had not the doctor and Rainor caught him.

"You can't—put it on me," he gasped defiantly. "It's a frame—"

A droning cry from behind made them all turn. Cowles's wife was standing in the doorway, shivering.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNCOVERED.

WITHOUT preamble, never moving from her place at the door, Mrs. Cowles started speaking. The words seemed torn from her very heart. Her wild eyes were bulging. Transfixed—the others listened.

"I saw him come home that day—I saw him and," they could hardly hear her, "there was blood on his cuff."

The slight figure of this only daughter of Walter Fleming whose murder they were striving to solve, made a pitiful picture. None doubted that she was speaking of her husband; she could mean no one else. Yet it was incredible that she should be denouncing him now, after all these months.

Cowles made no sign that he knew of his wife's presence beyond a contraction of the jaws when her voice broke out. His face against the dark cushion was like death.

All Rainor's attention centered in Mrs. Cowles.

"What day?" he queried quietly.

Her clawing hands knotted against her cheek.

"The day—my father was—murdered."

Breaking from Madison, Madeline Ruth ran and threw her arms about the stricken woman, leading her to a chair. Mrs. Cowles was going to pieces but she insisted upon talking. Her voice rose and fell, now in fierce emotion, now dully, as though she were repeating a lesson.

"Father phoned that morning for—for Hugh to go to the bank in the afternoon. I took the message and—he went. He didn't come back until after eight o'clock

—and there was blood," she laughed hysterically, "blood—my father's blood, on his cuff."

She covered her face while Madeline Ruth soothed her. Her expression was blank when she looked up again.

"It's been terrible since then. I went away—away from him but I had to come back—I wanted to see him wither under his guilt."

"Why didn't you tell?" asked Rainor.

"Because," her hands reached out toward Cowles and they were talon-like, clutching, "because I wanted to torture him. I never would have told if another man's life hadn't been put in danger."

They tried to realize this woman's frame of mind. Instead of letting the law exact vengeance she had chosen to take it in her own way.

"He knew that I knew what he had done," she added passionately, "and—I never let him forget."

They turned to Cowles who still lay like an image and tried to understand what he had gone through. Every moment he had been harried by the knowledge that the eyes of his wife, the daughter of the man he had murdered, were watching, watching—accusing. At any moment she might go to the police.

Rainor went over to Cowles.

"You heard?"

Just the hint of a nod answered him.

"Anything you want to say?"

The man on the couch parted his lids the fraction of an inch and gave a twisted smile. His injured arm drew up in a spasm of pain which brought the sweat to his forehead.

"Nothing at all, Rainor," he grunted it out with gameness, "except—that I did it."

Then there were two weeping women in the room, but Madeline Ruth's sobs were of joy. Leaving Mrs. Cowles's side she tottered toward Madison but before she had taken a step he had her in his embrace. She lifted her face and he marveled that such happiness should be his.

"I knew," she cried softly, putting an arm around his neck; "I knew!"

Cowles's voice startled them. It came in

snatches but evenly enough. In each other's arms they stood while he went on:

"It's true what Fallon said. My account was the one that was wrong—mine and a couple of others I fixed. Fleming didn't take any money. He was covering me up—because of Kitty. But after Madison went out that day, running away, Fleming started to call him back. He turned on me and said I would have to stand for what I had stolen. Then—then I hit him with the ruler—it was done before I knew it."

Fresh amazement gripped his hearers. To Madison, naturally, the shock was greatest. He had made himself a fugitive and a criminal before the world to save an old man who in reality was not guilty but would have sacrificed himself to protect his daughter's husband. It stupefied him.

"Do you mean that Fleming was taking the blame for your larceny," interrupted the chief, "and that when Madison undertook to assume the guilt he actually was taking it off you and not off Fleming?"

"That's it," said Cowles. "Fleming had discovered things were wrong about a week before. I tried to get him to keep quiet for the sake of my wife—his daughter. I told him," Cowles laughed, "that, of course, I would get it back—that I had only *borrowed* the money. I'd been borrowing a couple of years like that—through accounts and by substituting dummy packages for cash reserve—he said the bank examiners would find it out on their periodical visit which was about due. On account of Kitty he said he'd stand for it—and arrange to die suddenly."

"Tell you the truth," his tone became reminiscent, "when Madison made the proposition to bolt and appear guilty I nearly fell over and gave the game away. It was such a life-saver all round—if only Fleming hadn't repented the bargain the damned old fool would be alive to-day and everything would be all right."

"You hound," breathed Fallon.

"Sure," agreed Cowles, passing his good hand over his head. "Same way with the watchman—if he hadn't known I was there I wouldn't have killed him. Had I thought of it in time, Madison, I'd have shouted

and said you had murdered Fleming, but that never struck me until it was too late."

While they listened to his story the others could not but wonder at the unconcern with which it was related. There was in his bearing no shadow of fear of the death penalty that surely awaited him.

"When I decided to kill the watchman, I wiped the ruler to remove my finger-marks. It was easy to get King. I walked up as though to speak to him, and—one blow was enough."

A grin played on his bruised lips.

"The joke was on you all the time, Rainor. The money and bonds stayed in the bank for three days after that. They were on top of the high cabinet in Fleming's room. Never thought of looking around, did you?"

Rainor spoke as Cowles stopped:

"When did you leave the bank?"

Cowles raised his left hand apparently to cover a yawn.

"Oh," he said wearily, "I waited till it began to get dusk—after seven o'clock. I had to go then because the watchman's relief was due at eight. Just before I left by the side door I opened the front doors—that's why the night watchman found them so."

"You stayed in there with two dead men?" gasped Madison.

"What else could I do?" Cowles might have been answering a remark about the weather for all the concern he exhibited. "I couldn't go until I had a chance of getting away unseen."

In the ghastly silence, his wife again sobbed convulsively. Cowles's eyes flickered and his head went to the side so that he could see her.

"Don't worry, Kitty," he muttered sleepily, "I'll soon—be gone."

Another yawn mingled with a sigh. His jaw dropped.

Rainor whirled on the doctor:

"What's the matter with him?"

It was a minute before the physician comprehended.

"Good Lord," he exclaimed his eyes going to a chair at the couch-side, "he's taken morphin. I left two tablets in that spoon there when I filled the hypodermic."

"For the love of heaven, do something," yelled Rainor. "Get an ambulance, some body. No—there's a car outside. Take him in that." He grabbed the whisky bottle from its place in the cabinet and thrust it at the doctor, "A shot of this 'll help, won't it?"

They forced a liberal dose of the liquor down Cowles's throat and got him to his feet, pummeling him in an effort to shake off the coma. As he was being taken out, his wife moved after him.

"I'll go—with him," she said wanly to Madeline Ruth. "No matter what he's done, he is—I'll go."

From a window they saw her pillow Cowles's head in her lap as the auto took up speed in the dash to save a life so that the State might take it.

The weight of this latest tragedy which they had witnessed was strong upon them when John Madison turned to Madeline Ruth whose love had done so much to save him.

"When did you learn, dear, that your aunt saw Cowles?"

Madeline became flustered.

"I'm afraid that was a—a highlight out of my imagination," she admitted. "It 'll count among the white lies, though, don't you think?"

She looked at the chief and Fallon; then her eyes settled on Madison.

"I went to see Mrs. Cowles, this morning," explained the girl, "when you told me that you had left Mr. Cowles and Mr. Fleming together in the bank. I had a feeling—based on nothing, you know, except that I *felt* it—that she could tell something. When I impressed upon her that you, John, might be—electrocuted, she told me all about it. She didn't want to see her husband—that's why I had to go after her the second time. It was cruel of me but," her tears gathered, "I didn't see any other way to complete the case."

The telephone jangled. Rainor spoke in to it briefly and when he turned away his face was brighter.

"The hospital," he said. "They think he'll live."

"Poor devil," Madison echoed the

thought of all, "it would be better if they let him die."

The reaction got Madeline. Her weeping could no longer be controlled.

"Take me away, John," she whispered, "away from here—"

Madison looked at Rainor and smiled.

"I will, Madeline Ruth," he said, "as soon as the chief says the word."

"That's so, by jinks." The chief wrinkled his brows in doubt. "Got ten dollars?" he asked suddenly.

Madison produced it from the money Madeline had given him.

"What's it for?" He handed the bill to the chief.

"Bail," laughed Rainor. "You can show up Monday in court and we'll have you formally discharged. . . Meantime—"

"Thanks." Madison was husky now that it was all over. "I'll remember what you've done for me, chief. And you, too, Fallon. Come, Madeline, dearest."

Arm in arm he and the girl moved to the door. On the threshold he turned. His face was wistful over the recollection of the old bag he had been forced to abandon.

"By the way, chief, you haven't any idea how I could get hold of the bag I left on the steamer?"

"You bet I have," replied Rainor heartily. He hurried from the room and returned with the gladstone. "We had it brought right back."

"I—I—" Madison stammered. He waved to the chief and Fallon, "I'll—see you later."

With springy step he went on, Madeline Ruth's hand in one of his and the old bag in the other. They were disappearing when Rainor halted them again.

"Say," he cried, "don't forget I'm going to be at the wedding."

Fallon found his tongue:

"And so am I. I want to be first to greet the wife of the next mayor—Mrs. John Madison."

"Then you'll have to hurry." Madison smiled at Madeline Ruth's blushing cheek. "For we're on the way to get the license—and we're going to hunt up the blessed steamship Monterey for the honeymoon."

(The end.)

One Who Was Afraid

by William MacLeod Raine

Author of "The Pirate of Panama," "Men in the Raw," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ABOUT the only legacy that old John Beaudry left his five-year-old son when the guns of the utterly lawless Rutherfords blew him into the next world simply because he was a capable and thoroughgoing sheriff, was a legacy of timidity. The little boy's mother had seen one of her vigorous husband's battles and—baby Royal had to suffer. The shock killed her, too, at his birth.

So, being left an orphan, Royal Beaudry would have been in a bad way had it not been for Dave Dingwell, who put him through college and law school for the sake of his dead father. Always, though, Roy bore the stamp of timidity—almost cowardice—an acute dislike of trouble and danger.

He was not in the least pleased, therefore, when wizened little Patrick Ryan strolled into his office in Denver and asked him to go to the lair of the Rutherfords and find out what had happened to Dave Dingwell. This was seventeen years after his father's sudden death. He hemmed and hawed, but in the face of Ryan's open scorn could only go. Dave had found a cache of gold stolen and hidden by the Rutherfords, and they dared not kill him, since they would then lose the gold utterly, not knowing where Dave had hidden it. It was Chet Fox who betrayed him, as he had betrayed Roy's father.

So Roy went in the guise of a seller of windmills and under the name of Cherokee Street. First thing he did was to rescue Beulah Rutherford from a wolf-trap. Old Hal Rutherford was grateful, but his sons were suspicious.

"I'll send for Doc Spindler and have him look at your ankle," said her father tenderly.

"Oh, it's all right," the girl objected.

But Hal, the son, was sent. Later appeared Brad Charlton, and took instant exception to Roy's handsome face. Roy reciprocated mildly. And Charlton set himself to verify his suspicions.

CHAPTER VII.

A SPINNER OF WEBS.

THEN you left Denver, did you?" asked Charlton suavely.

Roy laughed. "Yes, then I left Denver and went to college and shouted 'Rah, rah, rah, Cornell.' In time I became a man and put away childish things. Can I sell you a windmill, Mr. Charlton, warranted to raise more water with less air pressure than any other in the market?"

"Been selling windmills long?" the rancher asked casually.

It was his ninth question in fifteen minutes. Beaudry knew that he was being cross-examined and his study of law had taught him that he had better stick to the truth so far as possible. He turned to Miss Rutherford.

"Your friend is bawling me out," he gaily pretended to whisper. "I never sold a windmill in my life. But I'm on my uppers. I've got a good proposition. This country needs the Dynamo Aermotor, and I need the money. So I took the agency. I have learned a fifteen minutes spiel. It gives seven reasons why Mr. Charlton will

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 13.

miss half the joy of life until he buys a Dynamo. Do you think he is a good prospect, Miss Rutherford?"

"Dad has been talking windmill," she said. "Sell him one."

"So has Jess Tighe," Charlton added. He turned to Jeff Rutherford. "Couldn't you take Mr. Street over to see Jess tomorrow morning?"

Jeff started promptly to decline, but as his friend's eyes met his he changed his mind. "I guess I could, maybe."

"I don't want to trouble you, Mr. Rutherford," objected Roy.

Something in the manner of Charlton annoyed Beulah. This young man was her guest. She did not see any reason why Brad should bombard him with questions.

"If Jeff is too busy I'll take you myself," she told Beaudry.

"Oh, Jeff won't be too busy. He can take a half-day off," put in his father.

When Charlton left Beulah followed him as far as the porch.

"Do you think Mr. Street is a horse-thief that you ask him so many questions?" she demanded indignantly.

He looked straight at her. "I don't know what he is, Beulah, but I'm going to find out."

"Isn't it possible that he is what he says he is?"

"Sure it's possible, but I don't believe it."

"Of course I know you like to think the worst of a man, but when you meet him in my house I'll thank you to treat him properly. I vouch for him."

"You never met him before this afternoon."

"That's *my* business. It ought to be enough for you that he is my guest."

Charlton filled in the ellipse. "If it isn't, I can stay away, can't I? Well, I'm not going to quarrel with you, Beulah. Good night."

As soon as he was out of sight of the ranch Charlton turned the head of his horse not toward his own place but toward that of Jess Tighe.

Dr. Spindler drove up while Beulah was still on the porch. He examined the bruised ankle, dressed it, and pronounced

that all it needed was a rest. No bones were broken, but the ligaments were strained. For several days she must give up riding and walking.

The ankle pained a good deal during the night, so that its owner slept intermittently. By morning she was no longer suffering, but was far too restless to stay in the house.

"I'm going to drive Mr. Street over to the Tighe place in the buggy," she announced at breakfast.

Her brothers exchanged glances.

"Think you'd better go so far with your bad ankle, honey?" Hal Rutherford, Sr., asked.

"It doesn't make any difference, dad, so long as I don't put my weight on it."

She had her way, as she usually did. One of the boys hitched up and brought the team to the front of the house. Beaudry took the seat beside Beulah.

The girl gathered up the reins, nodded good-by to her father, and drove off.

It was such a day as comes not more than a dozen times a season even in New Mexico. The pure light from the blue sky and the pine-combed air from the hills were like wine to their young blood. Once when the road climbed a hilltop the long, saw-toothed range lifted before them; but mostly they could not see beyond the bastioned ramparts that hemmed in the park or the nearer wooded gulches.

Beulah had brought her camera. They took pictures of each other. They gathered wild flowers. They talked as eagerly as children. Somehow the bars were down between them. The girl had lost the manner of sullen resentment that had impressed him yesterday. She was gay and happy and vivid. Wild roses bloomed in her cheeks. For this young man belonged to the great world outside in which she was so interested. Other topics than horses and cattle and drinking bouts were the themes of his talk. He had been to theaters and read books and visited large cities. His coming had enriched life for her.

The trail took them past a grove of young aspens which blocked the mouth of a small cañon by the thickness of the growth.

"Do you see any way in?" Beulah asked her companion.

"No. The trees are like a wall. There is not an open foot by which one could enter."

"Isn't there?" She laughed. "There's a way in just the same. You see that big rock over to the left? A trail drops down into the aspens back of it. A man lives in the gulch, an ex-convict. His name is Dan Meldrum."

"I expect he isn't troubled much with visitors."

"No. He lives alone. I don't like him. I wish he would move away. He doesn't do the park any good."

A man was sitting on the porch of the Tighe place as they drove up. Beside him lay a pair of crutches.

"That is Jess," the girl told Beaudry. "Don't mind if he is gruff or bad tempered. He is soured."

But evidently this was not the morning for Tighe to be gruff. He came to meet them on his crutches, a smile on his yellow sapless face. That smile seemed to Roy more deadly than anger. It did not warm the cold, malignant eyes nor light the morrant face with pleasure. Only the lips and mouth responded mechanically to it.

"Glad to see you, Miss Beulah. Come in."

He opened the gate and they entered. Presently Beaudry, his blood beating fast, found himself shaking hands with Tighe. The man had an odd trick of looking at one always from partly hooded eyes and at an angle.

"Mr. Street is selling windmills," explained Miss Rutherford. "Brad Charlton said you were talking of buying one, so here is your chance."

"Yes, I been thinking of it." Tighe's voice was suave. "What is your proposition, Mr. Street?"

Roy talked the Dynamo Aermotor for fifteen minutes. There was something about the still look of this man that put him into a cold sweat. It was all he could do to concentrate his attention on the patter of a salesman, but he would not let his mind wander from the single track upon which he was projecting it. He knew he

was being watched closely. To make a mistake might be fatal.

"Sounds good. I'll look your literature over, Mr. Street. I suppose you'll be in the park a few days?"

"Yes."

"Then you can come and see me again. I can't come to you so easy, Mr.—er—"

"Street," suggested Beulah.

"Tha's right—Street. Well, you see I'm kinder tied down." He indicated his crutches with a little lift of one hand. "Maybe Miss Beulah will bring you again."

"Suits me fine if she will," Beaudry agreed promptly.

The half-hooded eyes of the cripple slid to the girl and back again to Roy. He had a way of dry-washing the backs of his hands like Uriah Heep.

"Fine. You'll stay to dinner now, of course. Tha's good. Tha's good. Young folks don't know how it pleasures an old man to meet up with them sometimes." His low voice was as smooth as oil.

Beaudry conceived a horror of the man. The veiled sneer behind the smile on the sapless face, the hooded hawk eyes, the almost servile deference held a sinister threat that chilled the spine of his guest. The young man thought of him as of a repulsive spider spinning a web of trouble that radiated from this porch all over the Big Creek country.

"Been taking pictures of each other, I reckon. Fine. Fine. Now I wonder, Miss Beulah, if you'd do an old man a favor. This porch is my home, as you might say, seeing as how I'm sorter held down here. I'd kinder like a picture of it to hang up, providing it ain't asking too much of you."

"Of course not. I'll take it now," answered the girl.

"Tha's right good of you. I'll jest sit here and be talking to Mr. Street, as you might say. Wouldn't that make a good picture—kinder liven up the porch if we're on it?"

Roy felt a sudden impulse to protest, but he dared not yield to it. What was it this man wanted of the picture? Why had he baited a trap to get a picture of him without Beulah Rutherford knowing that he

particularly wanted it? While the girl took the photograph his mind was racing for Tighe's reason.

"I'll send you a copy as soon as I print it, Mr. Tighe," promised Beulah.

"I'll sure set a heap of store by it, Miss Beulah. If you don't mind helping me set the table we'll leave Mr. Street this old newspaper for a few minutes whilst we fix up a snack. You'll excuse us, Mr. Street? Tha's good."

Beulah went into the house the same gay and light-hearted comrade of Beaudry that she had been all morning. When he was called in to dinner he saw at once that Tighe had laid his spell upon her. She was again the sullen resentful girl of yesterday. Suspicion filmed her eyes. The eager light of faith in him that had quickened them while she listened for his answers to her naive questions about the great world was blotted out completely.

She sat through dinner in cold silence. Tighe kept the ball of conversation rolling and Beaudry tried to play up to him. They talked of stock, crops, and politics. Occasionally the host diverted the talk to outside topics. He asked the young man politely how he liked the park, whether he intended to stay long, how long he had lived in New Mexico, and other casual questions.

Roy was glad when dinner was over. He drew a long breath of relief when they had turned their backs upon the ranch. But his spirits did not register normal, even in the spring sunshine of the hills. For the dark eyes that met his were clouded with doubt and resentment.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEULAH ASKS QUESTIONS.

ASLIM, wiry youth in high-heeled boots came out of the house with Brad Charlton just as the buggy stopped at the porch of the horse ranch. He nodded to Beulah.

"Lo, sis."

"My brother Ned—Mr. Street." The girl introduced them a little sulkily.

Ned Rutherford offered Roy a coffee-

brown hand and looked at him with frank curiosity. He had just been hearing a lot about this good-looking stranger who had dropped into the park.

"See Jess Tighe? What did he say about the windmill?" asked Charlton.

"Wanted to think it over," answered Beaudry.

Beulah had drawn her brother to one side, but as Roy talked with Charlton he heard what the other two said, though each spoke in a low voice.

"Where you going, Ned?" the sister asked.

"Oh, huntin' strays."

"Home to-night?"

"Reckon not."

"What deviltry are you and Brad up to now? This will be the third night you've been away—and before that it was Jeff."

"S-sh!" Ned flashed a warning look in the direction of her guest.

But Beulah was angry. Tighe had warned her to be careful what she told Street. She distrusted the cripple profoundly. Half the evil that went on in the park was plotted by him. There had been a lot of furtive whispering about the house for a week or more. Her instinct told her that there was in the air some discreditable secret. More than once she had wondered whether her people had been the express company robbers for whom a reward was out. She tried to dismiss the suspicion from her mind, for the fear of it was like a leaden weight at her heart. But many little things contributed to the dread.

Rutherford had sent her just at that time to spend the week at Battle Butte. Had it been to get her out of the way? She remembered that her father had made to her no explanation of that scene in which she and Dave Dingwell had played the leading parts. There had been many journeyings back and forth on the part of the boys and Charlton and her uncle, Buck Rutherford. They had a way of getting off into a corner of the corral and talking low for hours at a time.

And now Street had come into the tangle. Were they watching him for fear he might be a detective?

Her resentment against him and them

boiled over into swift wrath. "You're a fine lot—all of you! I'd like to wash my hands clean of the whole outfit." She turned on her heel and strode, limping, to the house.

Ned laughed as he swung to the back of one of the two broncos, waiting with drooped heads before the porch. He admired this frank, forthright sister who blazed so handsomely into rage. He would have fought for her, even though he pretended to make a joke of her.

"Boots sure goes some. You see what you may be letting yourself in for, Brad," he scoffed good-naturedly.

Charlton answered with cool aplomb. "Don't you worry about me, Ned. I travel at a good lick myself. She'll break to double harness fine."

Without touching the stirrup this knight of the chaparejos flung himself into the saddle, the rowels of his spurs whirring as he vaulted. It was a spectacular but perfect mount. The horse was off instantly at a canter.

Roy could not deny the fellow admiration, even though he despised him for what he had just said. It was impossible for him to be contemptuous of Charlton. The man was too virile, too game for that. In the telling Western phrase, he would go through. Whatever he did was done competently.

Yet there was something detestable in the way he had referred to Beulah Rutherford. In the first place Roy believed it to be a pure assumption that he was going to marry her. Then, too, he had spoken of this high-spirited girl as if she were a colt to be broken, and he the man to wield the whip. Her rebellion against fate meant nothing more to him than a tantrum to be curbed. He did not in the least divine the spiritual unrest back of her explosion.

Beaudry shrugged his shoulders. He was lucky for once. It had been the place of Ned Rutherford to rebuke Charlton for his slighting remark. A stranger had not the least right to interfere while the brother of the girl was present. Roy did not pursue the point any further. He did not want to debate with himself whether he had the pluck to throw down the gauntlet to this

fighting *vaquero* if the call had come to him.

As he walked into the house and up to his room his mind was busy with another problem. Where had Ned Rutherford been for three nights, and his brother Jeff before that? Why had Beulah flared into unexpected anger? He, too, had glimpsed furtive whisperings. Even a fool would have understood that he was not a welcome guest at the horse-ranch, and that his presence was tolerated only because here the boys could keep an eye on him.

He was under surveillance. That was plain. He had started out for a little walk before breakfast, and Jeff joined him from nowhere in particular to stroll along. What was it the Huerfano Park settlers were trying to hide from him?

His mind jumped promptly to the answer. Dave Dingwell, of course.

Meanwhile Miss Rutherford lay weeping in the next room, face down upon the bed. She rarely indulged in tears. It had not happened before since she was seventeen. But now she sobbed into a pillow, softly, so that nobody might hear. Why must she spend her life in such surroundings? If the books she read told the truth the world was full of gentle, kindly people who lived within the law and respected each other's rights. Why was it in her horoscope to be an outcast? Why must she look at everybody with bitterness and push friendship from her lest it turn to poison at her touch?

For one hour she had found joy in comradeship with this stranger. Then Tighe had whispered that he was probably a spy. She had returned home only to have her doubts about her own family stirred to life again. Were there no good, honest folk in the world at all?

She washed her telltale eyes and ventured down-stairs to look after supper. The Mexican cook was already peeling the potatoes. She gave him directions about the meal and went out to the garden to get some radishes and lettuce. On the way she had to pass the corral. Her brother Hal, Slim Sanders, and Cherokee Street were roping and branding some calves. The guest of the house had hung his coat and hat on a fence-post to keep them from get-

ting soiled, but the hat had fallen into the dust.

Beulah picked up the hat and brushed it. As she dusted with her handkerchief the under side of the rim her eyes fell upon two initials stamped into the sweat-band. The letters were R. B. The owner of the hat called himself Cherokee Street. Why, then, should he have these other initials printed on the band? There could be only one answer to that question. He was passing under a name that was not his own.

If so, why?

Because he was a spy come to get evidence against her people for the express company.

The girl's eyes blazed. The man had come to ruin her father, to send her brothers to prison, and he was accepting their hospitality while he moled for facts to convict them. To hear the shout of his gay laughter as a calf upset him in the dust was added fuel to the fire of her anger. If he had looked as villainous as Dave Meldrum, she could have stood it better, but any one would have sworn he was a clean, decent young fellow just out of college.

She called to him. Roy glanced up and came across the corral. His sleeves were rolled to the elbows and the shirt open at the throat. Flowing muscles rippled under the white skin of his forearms as he vaulted the fence to stand beside her. He had the graceful poise of an athlete and the beautiful trim figure of youth.

Yet he was a spy. Beulah hardened her heart.

"I found your hat in the dust, Mr. Street." She held it out to him upside down, the leather band lifted by her finger so that the letters stood out.

The rigor of her eyes was a challenge. For a moment, before he caught sight of the initials, he was puzzled at her stiffness. Then his heart lost a beat and hammered wildly. His brain was in a fog and he could find no words of explanation.

"It is your hat, isn't it, Mr.—Street?"

"Yes." He took it from her, put it on, and gulped "Thanks."

She waited to give him a chance to justify himself, but he could find no answer to

the charge that she had fixed upon him. Scornfully she turned from him and went to the house.

Miss Rutherford found her father reading a week-old newspaper.

"I've got fresher news than that for you, dad," she said. "I can tell you who this man that calls himself Cherokee Street isn't."

Rutherford looked up quickly. "You mean who he is, Boots?"

"No, I mean who he isn't. His name isn't Cherokee Street at all."

"How do you know?"

"Because he is wearing a hat with the initials R. B. stamped in it. I gave him a chance to explain, and he only stammered and got white. He hadn't time to think up a lie that would fit."

"Dad burn it, Jess Tighe is right then. The man is a spy!" The ranchman lit a cigar and narrowed his eyes in thought.

"What is he spying here for?"

"I reckon he's a detective of the express company nosing around about that robbery. Some folks think it was pulled off by a bunch up in the hills somewhere."

"By the Rutherford gang?" she quoted.

He looked at her uneasily. The bitterness in her voice put him on the defensive. "Sho, Boots! That's just a way folks have of talking. We've got our enemies. Lots of people hate us because we won't let any one run over us."

She stood straight and slender before him, her eyes fixed in his. "Do they say we robbed the express company?"

"They don't say it out loud if they do—not where I can hear them," he answered grimly.

"Did we?" she flung at him.

His smile was forced. The question disturbed him. That had always been her way, even when she was a small child, to fling herself headlong at difficulties. She had never been the kind to be put off with anything less than the truth.

"I didn't. Did you?" he retorted.

"How about the boys—and Uncle Buck—and Brad Charlton?" she demanded.

"Better ask them if you want to know."

With a flare of temper he contradicted himself. "No, you'd better mind your own

business, girl. Forget your foolishness and 'tend to your knitting."

"I suppose it isn't my business if my kin go to the penitentiary for train robbery."

"They're not going any such place. If you want to know, I give you my word that none of us Rutherfords have got the gold stolen from the Western Express Company."

"And don't know where it is?"

"Haven't the least idea—not one of us."

She drew a deep breath of relief. More than once her father had kept from her secrets of the family activities, but he had never lied to her.

"Then it doesn't matter about this detective. He can find out nothing against us," she reflected aloud.

"I'm not so sure about that. We've had our troubles, and we don't want them aired. There was that shooting scrape Hal got into down at Battle Butte, for instance. Get a little more evidence and the wrong kind of a jury would send him up for it. No, we'll keep an eye on Mr. Cherokee Street, or whatever his name is. Reckon I'll ride over and have a talk with Jess about it."

"Why not tell this man Street that he is not wanted, and so be done with it?"

"Because we wouldn't be done with it. Another man would come in his place. We'll keep him here where we can do a little detective work on him too."

"I don't like it. The thing is underhanded. I hate the fellow. It's not decent to sit at table with a man who is betraying our hospitality," she cried hotly.

"It won't be for long, honey. Just leave him to us. We'll hang up his pelt to dry before we're through with him."

"You don't mean—"

"No, nothing like that. But he'll crawl out of the park like a whipped cur with its tail between its legs."

The cook stood in the doorway. "Miss Beulah, do you want that meat done in a pot-roast?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll show you." She turned at the door. "By the way, dad, I took a snap-shot of Mr. Tighe on his porch. I'll develop it to-night, and you can take it to him in the morning."

"All right. Don't mention to anybody that matter we were discussing. Act like you've forgotten all about what you found out, Boots."

The girl nodded. "Yes."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN ON THE BED.

BEULAH RUTHERFORD found it impossible to resume a relation of friendliness toward her guest. By nature she was elemental and direct. A few months earlier she had become the teacher of the Big Creek school, but until that time life had never disciplined her to repress the impulses of her heart. As a child she had been a fierce, wild little creature, full of savage affections and generosity. She still retained more feminine ferocity than social usage permits her sex.

It was not in her to welcome an enemy with smiles while she hated him in her soul. The best she could do was to be brusquely civil whenever she met Beaudry.

As for that young man, he was in a most unhappy frame of mind. He writhed at the false position in which he found himself. It was bad enough to forfeit the good opinion of this primitive young hill beauty, but it was worse to know that in a measure he deserved it. He saw, too, that serious consequences were likely to follow her discovery, and he waited with nerves on the jump for the explosion.

None came. When he dragged himself to dinner Beulah was stiff as a ramrod, but he could note no difference in the manner of the rest. Was it possible she had not told her father? He did not think this likely, and his heart was in panic all through the meal.

Though he went to his room early, he spent a sleepless night full of apprehension. What were the Rutherfords waiting for? He was convinced that something sinister lay behind their silence.

After breakfast the ranchman rode away. Jeff and Slim Sanders jogged off on their cow-ponies to mend a broken bit of fence. Hal sat on the porch replacing with rivets the torn strap of a stirrup.

Beaudry could stand it no longer. He found his hostess digging around the roots of some rose bushes in her small garden. Curtly she declined his offer to take the spade. For a minute he watched her uneasily before he blurted out his intention of going.

"I'll move up to the other end of the park and talk windmill to the ranchers there, Miss Rutherford. You've been awfully good to me, but I won't impose myself on your hospitality any longer," he said.

He had dreaded to make the announcement for fear of precipitating a crisis, but the young woman made no protest. Without a word of comment she walked beside him to the house.

"Hal, will you get Mr. Street's horse?" she asked her brother. "He is leaving this morning."

Young Rutherford's eyes narrowed. It was plain he had been caught by surprise and did not know what to do.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"What do you care where he is going? Get the horse—or I will," she ordered imperiously.

"I'm going to board at one of the ranches farther up the park," explained Roy.

"Better wait till dad comes home," suggested Hal.

"No, I'll go now." Royal Beaudry spoke with the obstinacy of a timid man who was afraid to postpone the decision.

"No hurry, is there?" The black eyes of Rutherford fixed him steadily.

His sister broke in impatiently. "Can't he go when he wants to, Hal? Get Mr. Street's horse." She whirled on Beaudry scornfully. "That is what you call yourself, isn't it—Street?"

The unhappy youth murmured "Yes."

"Let him get his own horse if he wants to hit the trail in such a hurry," growled Hal sulkily.

Beulah walked straight to the stable. Awkwardly Beaudry followed her after a moment or two. The girl was leading his horse from the stall.

"I'll saddle him, Miss Rutherford," he murmured, the blanket in his hand.

She looked at him a moment, dropped the bridle, and turned stiffly away. He understood perfectly that she had been going to saddle the horse to justify the surface hospitality of the Rutherfords to a man they despised.

Hal was still on the porch when Roy rode up, but Beulah was nowhere in sight. The young hillman did not look up from the rivet he was driving. Beaudry swung to the ground and came forward.

"I'm leaving now. I should like to tell Miss Rutherford how much I'm in her debt for taking a stranger in so kindly," he faltered.

"I reckon you took her in just as much as she did you, Mr. Spy." Rutherford glowered at him menacingly. "I'd advise you to straddle that horse and git."

Roy controlled his agitation except for a slight trembling of the fingers that grasped the mane of his cow-pony. "You've used a word that isn't fair. I didn't come here to harm any of your people. If I could explain to Miss Rutherford—"

She stood in the doorway, darkly contemptuous. Fire flashed in her eyes, but the voice of the girl was coldly insolent.

"It is not necessary," she informed him.

Her brother leaned forward a little. His crouched body looked like a coiled spring in its tenseness. "Explain yourself down that road, Mr. Street—*pronto*," he advised.

Beaudry flashed a startled glance at him, swung to the saddle, and was away at a canter. The look in Rutherford's glittering eyes had sent a flare of fear over him. The impulse of it had lifted him to the back of the horse and out of danger.

But already he was flogging himself with his own contempt. He had given way to panic before a girl who had been brought up to despise a quitter. She herself had nerves as steady as chilled steel. He had seen her clench her strong white little teeth without a murmur through a long afternoon of pain. Gameness was one of the fundamentals of her creed, and he had showed the white feather.

It added to his punishment, too, that he worshiped pluck with all the fervor of one who knew he had none. Courage seemed to him the one virtue worth while; cow-

ardice the unpardonable sin. He made no excuses for himself. From his father he inherited the fine tradition of standing up to punishment to a fighting finish. His mother, too, had been a thoroughbred.

Yet he was a weakling. His heart pumped water instead of blood whenever the call to action came.

In dejection he rode up the valley, following the same hilly trail he had taken yesterday with Miss Rutherford. It took him past the aspen grove at the mouth of the gulch which led to the Meldrum place. Beyond this a few hundred yards he left the main road and went through the chaparral toward a small ranch that nestled close to the timber. Beulah had told him it belonged to an old German named Rothgerber who had lived there with his wife ever since she could remember.

Rothgerber was a little wrinkled old man with a strong South German accent. After Beaudry had explained that he wanted board the rancher called his wife out and the two jabbered away excitedly in their native tongue. The upshot of it was that they agreed to take the windmill agent if he would room in an old bunk house about two hundred yards from the house.

This happened to suit Roy exactly, and he closed the matter by paying for a week in advance.

The Rothgerbers were simple, unsuspecting people of a garrulous nature. It was easy for Beaudry to pump information from them while he ate supper. They had seen nothing of any stranger in the valley except himself, but they dropped casually the news that the Rutherfords had been going in and out of Chicito Cañon a good deal during the past few days.

"Chicito Cañon. That's a Mexican name, isn't it? Let's see. Just where is this gulch?" asked Beaudry.

The old German pointed out of the window. "There it iss, mein friend. You pass by on the road and there iss no way in—no arroyo, no gulch, no noddings but aspens. But there iss shust the same a trail. Through my pasture it leads."

"Anybody live up Chicito? I want everybody in the park to get a chance to buy a Dynamo Aermotor before I leave."

"A man named Meldrum. My advice iss—let him alone."

"Why?"

Rothgerber shook a pudgy forefinger in the air. "Mein friend, listen. You are a stranger in Huerfano Park. *Gut*. But do not ask questions about those who lif here. Me, I am an honest man. I keep the law. Also, I mind my own business. So it iss with many. But there are others—mind, I gif them no names, but—" He shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands, palm up. "Well, the less said the petter. If I keep my tongue still I do not talk myself into trouble. Not so, Berta?"

The pippin-cheeked little woman nodded her head sagely.

In the course of the next few days Roy rode to and fro over the park trying to sell his windmill to the ranchers. He secured two orders and the tentative promise of others. But he gained no clue as to the place where Dingwell was hidden.

His intuition told him that the trail up Chicito Cañon would lead him to the captive cattleman. Twice he skirted the dark gash of the ravine at the back of the pasture, but each time his heart failed at the plunge into its unknown dangers. The first time he persuaded himself that he had better make the attempt at night, but when he stood on the brink in the darkness the gulf at his feet looked like a veritable descent into Avernus.

If he should be caught down here his fate would be sealed. What Meldrum and Tighe would do to a spy was not a matter of conjecture. The thought of it brought goose-quills to his flesh and tiny beads of perspiration to his forehead.

Still, the peril had to be faced. He decided to go up the cañon in the early morning before the travel of the day had begun. The night before he made the venture he prepared an alibi by telling Mrs. Rothgerber that he would not come to breakfast, as he wanted to get an early start for his canvassing.

The little German woman bustled about and wrapped up for him a cold lunch to eat at his cabin in the morning. She liked this quiet good-looking young man whose

smile was warm for a woman almost old enough to be his grandmother. It was not often she met any one with the charming deference he showed her. Somehow he reminded her of her own Hans, who had died from the kick of a horse ten years since.

Roy slept in broken cat-naps full of fearful dreams, from which he woke in terror under the impression that he was struggling helplessly in the net of a great spider which had the cruel, bloodless face of Tighe. It was three o'clock when he rose and began to dress. He slipped out of the cabin into the wet pasture. His legs were sopping wet from the long grass through which he strode to the edge of the gulch. On a flat boulder he sat shivering in the darkness while he waited for the first gray streaks of light.

In the dim dawn he stumbled uncertainly down the trail into the cañon, the bottom of which was still black as night from a heavy growth of young aspens that shut out the light. There was a fairly well-worn path leading up the gulch, so that he could grope his way forward slowly. His feet moved reluctantly. It seemed to him that his nerves, his brain, and even his muscles were in revolt against the moral compulsion that drove him on.

He could feel his heart beating against his ribs. Every sound startled him. The still darkness took him by the throat. Doggedly he fought against the panic impulse to turn and fly.

If he quit now, he told himself, he could never hold his self-respect. He thought of all those who had come into his life in connection with the Big Creek country trouble. His father, his mother, Dave Dingwell, Pat Ryan, Jess Tighe, the whole Rutherford clan, including Beulah! One quality they all had in common, the gameness to see out to a finish anything they undertook. He could not go through life a confessed coward. The idea was intolerably humiliating.

Then, out of the past, came to him a snatch of nonsense verse.

Li'l ole hawss an' li'l ole cow,
Amblin' along by the ole hay mow,
Li'l ole hawss took a bite an' a chew,
"Durned if I don't," says the ole cow, too.

So vivid was his impression of the doggerel that for an instant he thought he

heard the singsong of his father's tuneless voice. In sharp, clean-cut pictures his memory reproduced the night John Beaudry had last chanted the lullaby, and that other picture of the Homeric fight of one man against a dozen. The foolish words were a bracer to him. He set his teeth and plowed forward, still with a quaking soul, but with a kind of despairing resolution.

After a mile of stiff going the gulch opened to a little valley on the right hand side. On the edge of a pine grove, hardly a stone's throw from where Roy stood, a Mexican *jacal* looked down into the cañon. The hut was a large one. It was built of upright poles daubed with clay. Sloping poles formed the roof, the chinks of which were waterproofed with grass. A wolf pelt, nailed to the wall, was hanging up to dry.

He knew that this was the home of Meldrum, the ex-convict.

Beaudry followed a bed of boulders that straggled toward the pine grove. It was light enough now, and he had to move with caution so as to take advantage of all the cover he could find. Once in the grove he crawled from tree to tree. The distance from the nearest pine to the *jacal* was about thirty feet. A clump of cholla grew thick just outside the window.

Roy crouched behind the trunk for several minutes before he could bring himself to take the chance of covering that last ten yards. But every minute it was getting lighter. Every minute increased the likelihood of detection. He crept fearfully to the hut, huddled behind the cactus, and looked into the window.

A heavy-set man with the muscle-bound shoulders of an ape was lighting a fire in the stove. At the table, his thumbs hitched in a sagging revolver belt, sat Ned Rutherford. The third person in the room lay stretched at supple ease on a bed, to one of the posts of which his right leg was bound. He was reading a newspaper.

"Get a move on you, Meldrum," young Rutherford said jauntily, with an eye on his prisoner, to see how he took it. "I've got inside information that I need some hot cakes, a few slices of bacon, and a cup of coffee. How about it, Dave? Won't you order breakfast too?"

The man on the bed shook his head indifferently. "Me, I'm taking the fast cure. I been reading that we all eat too much anyhow. What's the use of stuffing—gets yore system all clogged up. Now, take Edison—he don't eat but a handful of rice a day."

"That's one handful more than you been eating for the past three days. Better come through with what we want to know. This thing ain't going to get any better for you. A man has got to eat to live."

"I'm trying out another theory. Tell you all about how it works in a week or so. I reckon after a time I'll get real hungry, but it don't seem like I could relish any chuck yet." The cattelman fell to perusing his paper once more.

Royal Beaudry had never met his father's friend, Dave Dingwell, but he needed no introduction to this brown-faced man who mocked his guard with such smiling hardihood. They were trying to starve the secret out of him.

Already his cheek showed thin and gaunt, dark circles shadowed the eyes. The man no doubt was suffering greatly, yet his manner gave no sign of it. He might not be master of his fate; at least he was very much the captain of his soul. Pat Ryan had described him in a sentence: "One hundred and ninety pounds of devil, and ivery ounce of ivery pound true gold." There could not be another man in the Big Creek country that this description fitted as well as it did this starving, jocund daredevil on the bed.

The savory odor of bacon and coffee came through the open window to Beaudry where he crouched in the chaparral. He heard Meldrum's brusk, "Come and get it," and the sound of the two men drawing up their chairs to the table.

"What's the use of being obstinate, Dave?" presently asked Rutherford from amid a pleasant chink of tin cups, knives and forks. "I'd a heap rather treat you like a white man. This 'Pache' business doesn't make a hit with me. But I'm obeying orders. Anyhow, it's up to you. The chuck wagon is ready for you whenever you say the word."

"I don't reckon I'll say it, Ned. Eating

is just a habit. One man wants his eggs sunny side up; another is strong for them hard-boiled. But eggs is eggs. When Dan went visitin' at Santa Fé he likely changed his diet. For two or three days he probably didn't like the grub, then—"

With a raucous curse the former convict swung round on him. A revolver seemed to jump to his hand, but before he could fire young Rutherford was hanging to his wrist.

"Don't you, Dan. Don't you!" warned Ned.

Slowly Meldrum's eyes lost their savage glare. "One o' these days I'll pump lead into him unless he clamps that mouth of his'n. I won't stand for it." His voice trailed into a string of oaths.

Apparently his fury at this reference to his convict days did not disturb in the least the man on the bed. His good-natured drawl grew slightly more pronounced. "Wall yore eyes and wave yore tail all you've a mind to, Dan. I was certainly some indiscreet reminding you of those days when you was a guest of the government."

"That's enough," growled Meldrum, slamming his big fist down on the table so that the tinware jumped.

"Sure it's enough. Too much. How come I to be so forgetful? If I'd wore a uniform two years for rustling other folks' calves, I reckon I wouldn't thank a guy—"

But Meldrum had heard all he could stand. He had to do murder or get out. He slammed the coffee pot down on the floor and bolted out of the open door. His arms whirled in violent gestures as he strode away. An unbroken stream of profanity floated back to mark his departure.

Meldrum did not once look round as he went on his explosive way to the gulch, but Roy Beaudry crouched lower behind the cactus until the man had disappeared. Then he crawled back to the grove, slipped through it, and crept to the shelter of the boulder bed.

It would not do for him to return down the cañon during daylight, for fear he might meet one of the Rutherfords coming to relieve Ned. He passed from one boulder to another, always working up toward the wall of the gulch. Behind a big piece of

sandstone, shaped like a flatiron, he lay down and waited for the hours to pass.

It was twilight when he stole down to the trail and began his return journey.

CHAPTER X.

DAVE TAKES A RIDE.

DAVE DINGWELL had sauntered carelessly out of the Legal Tender on the night of his disappearance. He was apparently at perfect ease with a friendly world. But if any one had happened to follow him out of the saloon he would have seen an odd change in the ranchman. He slid swiftly along the wall of the building until he had melted into the shadows of darkness. His eyes searched the neighborhood for lurking figures while he crouched behind the trunk of a cottonwood.

Every nerve of the man was alert, every muscle ready for action. One brown hand lingered affectionately close to the butt of his revolver.

He had come out of the front door of the gambling house because he knew the Rutherfords would expect him in the exercise of ordinary common sense to leave by the rear exit. That he would be watched was certain. Therefore he had done the unexpected and walked boldly out through the swinging doors.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he made out a horse in the clump of trees about twenty yards to the left. Whether it was Teddy he could not be sure, but there was no time to lose. Already a signal whistle had shrilled out from the other side of the street. Dave knew this was to warn the guards at the rear of the Legal Tender that their prey was in the open.

He made a dash for the tree-clump, but almost as he reached it swung to the left and circled the small grove so as to enter it from the other side. As he expected, a man whirled to meet him. The unforeseen tactics of Dingwell had interfered with the ambush.

Dave catapulted into him head first and the two went down together. Before Ding-

well could grip the throat of the man beneath him a second body hurled itself through space at the cattleman. The attacked man flattened under the weight crushing him, but his right arm swept around and embraced the neck of his second assailant. He flexed his powerful forearm so as to crush as in a vise the throat of his foe between it and the hard biceps.

The breath of the first man had for the moment been knocked out of him and he was temporarily not in the fight. The ranchman gave his full attention to the other.

The fellow struggled savagely. He had a gun in his right hand, but the fingers of Dave's left had closed upon the wrist above. Stertorous breathing gave testimony that the gunman was in trouble. In spite of his efforts to break the hold that kept his head in chancery the muscles of the arm tightened round his neck like steel ropes drawn taut. He groaned, sighed in a ragged expulsion of breath, and suddenly collapsed.

Before he relaxed his muscles Dingwell made sure that the surrender was a genuine one. His left hand slid down and removed the revolver from the nerveless fingers. The barrel of it was jammed against the head of the man above him while the rancher freed himself from the weight of the body. Slowly the cattleman got to his feet.

Vaguely he had been aware already that men were running toward the tree-clump. Now he heard the padding of their feet close at hand. He ran to the horse and flung himself into the saddle, but before the animal had moved two steps some one had it by the bridle. Another man caught Dingwell by the arm and dragged him from the saddle.

Before Dave could scramble to his feet again something heavy fell upon his head and shook him to the heels. A thousand lights flashed in zigzags before his eyes. He sank back into unconsciousness.

The cowman returned to a world of darkness, out of which voices came as from a distance hazily. A groan prefaced his arrival.

"Dave's waking up," one of the far voices said.

"Sure. When you tap his haid with a six-gun you're liable to need repairs on the gun," a second answered.

The next words came to Dingwell more distinctly. He recognized the speaker as Hal Rutherford of the horse ranch.

"Too bad the boy had to hand you that crack, Dave. You're such a bear for fighting a man can't take any chances. Glad he didn't bust your haid wide open."

"Sure he didn't?" asked the injured man. "I feel like I got to hold it on tight so as to keep the blamed thing from flying into fifty pieces."

"Sorry. We'll take you to a doc and have it fixed up. Then we'll all go have a drink. That'll fix you."

"Business first," cut in Buck Rutherford.

"That's right, Dave," agreed the owner of the horse ranch. "How about that gunnysack? Where did you hide it?"

Dingwell played for time. He had not the least intention of telling, but if he held the enemy in parley some of his friends might pass that way.

"What gunnysack, Hal? Jee-rusalem, how my head aches!" He held his hands to his temples and groaned again.

"Your head will mend—if we don't have to give it another crack," Buck told him grimly. "Get busy, Dave. We want that gold—*pronto*. Where did you put it?"

"Where *did* I put it? That willing lad of yours has plumb knocked the answer out of my noodle. Maybe you're thinking of some one else, Buck." Dingwell looked up at him with an innocent bland smile.

"Come through," ordered Buck with an oath.

The cattleman treated them to another dismal groan. "Gee, I feel like the day after Christmas. Was it a cannon the kid hit me with?"

Meldrum pushed his ugly phiz to the front. "Don't monkey away any time, boys. String him to one of these cottonwoods till he spits out what we want."

"Was it while you was visiting up at Santa Fé you learnt that habit of seeing yore neighbors hanged, Dan?" drawled Dingwell in a voice of gentle irony.

Furious at this cool reference to his peni-

tentiary days, Meldrum kicked their captive in the ribs. Hal Rutherford caught the former convict by the throat.

"Do that again and I'll hang yore hide up to dry." He shook Meldrum as if he were a child, then flung the gasping man away. "I'll show you who's boss of this *rodeo*, by gum."

Meldrum had several notches on his gun. He was, too, a rough and tumble fighter with his hands. But Hal Rutherford was one man he knew better than to tackle. He fell back, growling threats in his throat.

Meanwhile Dave was making discoveries. One was that the first two men who had attacked him were the gamblers he had driven from the Legal Tender earlier in the evening. The next was that Buck Rutherford was sending the professional tinhorns about their business.

"Git!" ordered the big rancher. "And keep gitting till you've crossed the border. Don't look back any. Jest burn the wind. *Adios*."

"They meant to gun you, Dave," guessed the owner of the horse ranch. "I reckon they daren't shoot with me loafing there across the road. You kinder disarranged their plans some more by dropping in at their back door. Looks like you'd 'a' rumpled by their hair a few if you hadn't been in such a hurry to make a getaway. Which brings us back to the previous question. The unanimous sense of the meeting is that you come through with some information, Dave. Where is that gunnysack?"

Dave, still sitting on the ground, leaned his back against a tree and grinned amiably at his questioner. "Sounds like you-all been to school to a parrot. You must 'a' quitted after you learned one sentence."

"We're waiting for an answer, Dave."

The cool steady eyes of Dingwell met the imperious ones of the other man in a long, even gaze. "Nothing doing, Hal."

"Even split, Dave. Fifty-fifty."

The sitting man shook his head. "I'll split the reward with you when I get it. The sack goes back to the express company."

"We'll see about that." Rutherford turned to his son and gave brisk orders. "Bring up the horses. We'll get out of

here. You ride with me, Jeff. We'll take care of Dingwell. The rest of you scatter. We're going back to the park."

The Rutherfords and their captive followed no main road, but out across country in a direction where they would be less likely to meet travelers. It was a land of mesquite and prickly-pear. The sting of the cactus bit home in the darkness as its claws clutched at the riders, winding their slow way through the chaparral.

Gray day was dawning when they crossed the Creosote Flats and were seen by a sheep-herder at a distance. The sun was high in the heavens before they reached the defile which served as a gateway between the foothills and the range beyond. It had passed the meridian by the time they were among the summits where they could look back upon rounded hills numberless as the billows of a sea. Deeper and always deeper they plunged into the maze of cañons which gashed into the saddles between the peaks. Blue-tinted dusk was enveloping the hills as they dropped down through a wooded ravine into Huerfano Park.

"Home soon," Dave suggested cheerfully to his captors. "I sure am hungry enough to eat a government mail-sack. A flank steak would make a big hit with me."

Jeff looked at him in the black Rutherford way. "This is no picnic, you'll find."

"Not to you, but it's a great vacation for me. I feel a hundred per cent better since I got up into all this ozone and scenery," Dingwell assured him hardily. "A man ought to take a trip like this once in a while. It's great for what ails him."

Young Rutherford grunted sulkily. Their prisoner was the coolest customer he had ever met. The man was no fool. He must know he was in peril, but he was grit clear through.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEB IS TIGHTENED.

THE hooded eyes of Jess Tighe slanted across the table at his visitor. Not humor but mordant irony had given birth to the sardonic smile on his thin, bloodless lips.

"I reckon you'll be glad to know that you've been entertaining an angel un-awares, Hal," he jeered. "I've been looking up your handsome young friend, and I can tell you what the R. B. in his hat stands for in case you would be interested to know."

The owner of the horse ranch gave a little nod. "Unload your information, Jess."

Tighe leaned forward for emphasis and bared his teeth. If ever malevolent hate was written on a face it found expression on his now.

"R. B. stands for Royal Beaudry."

Rutherford flashed a question at him from startled eyes. He waited for the other man to continue.

"You remember the day we put John Beaudry out of business?" asked Tighe.

"Yes. Go on." Hal Rutherford was not proud of that episode. In the main he had fought fair, even though he had been outside the law. But on the day he had avenged the death of his brother Anson the feud between him and the sheriff had degenerated to murder. A hundred times since he had wished that he had gone to meet the officer alone.

"He had his kid with him. Afterward they shipped him out of the country to an aunt in Denver. He went to school there. Well, I've had a little sleuthing done."

"And you've found out—"

"What I've told you."

"How?"

"He said his name was Cherokee Street, but Jeff told me he didn't act like he believed himself. When yore girl remembered there was a street of that name in Denver, Mr. Cherokee Street was plumb rattled. He seen he'd made a break."

"Well, you saw that snap-shot Beulah took of him and me on the porch. I sent it to a detective agency in Denver with orders to find out the name of the man that photo fitted. My idea was for the manager to send a man to the teachers of the high schools, beginning with the school nearest Cherokee Street. He done it. The third schoolmarm took one look at the picture and said the young fellow was Royal Beaudry. She had taught him German two

years. That's how come I to know what that R. B. in the hat stands for."

"Perhaps it is some other Beaudry."

"Take another guess," retorted the cripple scornfully. "Right off when I clapped eyes on him I knew he reminded me of somebody. I know now who it was."

"But what's he doing up here?" asked the big man.

The hawk eyes of Tighe glittered. "What do you reckon the son of John Beaudry would be doing here?" He answered his own question with bitter animosity. "He's gathering evidence to send Hal Rutherford and Jess Tighe to the penitentiary. That's what he's doing?"

Rutherford nodded. "Sure. What else would he be doing if he is a chip of the old block? That's where his father's son ought to put us if he can."

Tighe beat his fist on the table, his face a map of appalling fury and hate. "Let him go to it, then. I've been a cripple seventeen years because Beaudry shot me up. By God, I'll gun his son inside of twenty-four hours. I'll stomp him off'n the map like he was a rattlesnake."

"No," vetoed Rutherford curtly.

"What? What's that you say?" snarled the other.

"I say he'll get a run for his money. If there's any killing to be done it will be in fair fight."

"What's ailing you?" sneered Tighe. "Getting soft in your upper story? Mean to lie down and let that kid run you through to the pen like his father did Dan Mel-drum?"

"Not in a thousand years," came back Rutherford. "If he wants war he gets it. But I'll not stand for any killing from ambush, and no killing of any kind unless it has to be. Understand?"

"That sounds to me," purred the smaller man in the Western slang that phrased incredulity. Then, suddenly, he foamed at the mouth. "Keep out of this if you're squeamish. Let me play out the hand. I'll bump him off *pronto!*"

"No, Jess."

"What do you think I am?" screamed Tighe. "Seventeen years I've been hog-tied to this house because of Beaudry.

Think I'm going to miss my chance now? If he was Moody and Sankey rolled into one I'd go through with it. And what is he—a spy come up here to gather evidence against you and me! Didn't he creep into your house so as to sell you out when he got the goods? Hasn't he lied from start to finish?"

"Maybe so. But he has no proof against us yet. We'll kick him out of the park. I'm not going to have his blood on my conscience. That's flat, Jess."

The eyes in the bloodless face of the other man glittered, but he put a curb on his passion. "What about me, Hal? I've waited half a lifetime and now my chance has come. Have you forgot who made me the misshaped thing I am? I haven't. I'll go through hell to fix Beaudry's cub the way he did me." His voice shook from the bitter intensity of his feeling.

Rutherford paced up and down the room in a stress of sentiency. "No, Jess. I know just how you feel, but I'm going to give this kid his chance. We gunned Beaudry because he wouldn't let us alone. Either he or a lot of us had to go. But I'll say this: I never was satisfied with the way we did it. When Jack Beaudry shot you up he was fighting for his life. We attacked him. You got no right to hold it against his son."

"I don't ask you to come in. I'll fix his clock all right."

"Nothing doing. I won't have it." Rutherford, by a stroke of strategy, carried the war into the country of the other. "I gave way to you about Dingwell, though I hated to try that Indian stuff on him. He's a white man. I've always liked him. It's a rotten business."

"What else can you do? We daren't turn him loose. You don't want to gun him. There's nothing left but to tighten the thumb-screws."

"It won't do any good," protested the big man with a frown. "He's game. He'll go through. And if it comes to a show-down I won't have him starved to death."

Tighe looked at him through half-hooded, cruel eyes. "He'll weaken. Another day or two will do it. Don't worry about Dingwell."

"There's not a yellow streak in him. You haven't a chance to make him quit." Rutherford took another turn up and down the room diagonally. "I don't like this way of fighting. It's—damnable, man! I won't have any harm come to Dave or to the kid either. I stand pat on that, Jess."

The man with the crutches swallowed hard. His Adam's apple moved up and down like an agitated thermometer. When he spoke it was in a smooth, oily voice of submission, but Rutherford noticed the rapacious eyes.

"What you say goes, Hal. You're boss of this round-up. I was jest telling you how it looked to me."

"Sure. That's all right, Jess. But you want to remember that public sentiment is against us. We've pretty near gone our limit up here. If there was no other reason but that, it would be enough to make us let this young fellow alone. We can't afford a killing in the park now."

Tighe assented, almost with servility. But the cattleman carried away with him a conviction that the man had yielded too easily, that his restless brain would go on planning destruction for young Beaudry just the same.

He was on his way up Chicito Cañon, and he stopped at Rothgerber's ranch to see Beaudry. The young man was not at home.

"He start early this morning to canfass for his vindmill," the old German explained.

After a moment's thought Rutherford left a message. "Tell him it isn't safe for him to stay in the park, that certain parties know who R. B. is and will sure act on that information. Say I said for him to come and see me soon as he gets back. Understand? Right away when he reaches here."

The owner of the horse ranch left his mount in the Rothgerber corral and passed through the pasture on foot to Chicito. Half an hour later he dropped into the *jacal* of Meldrum.

He found the indomitable Dingwell again quizzing Meldrum about his residence at Santa Fé during the days he wore a striped uniform. The former convict was grinding his teeth with fury.

"I reckon you won't meet many old friends when you go back this time, Dan. Maybe there will be one or two old-timers that will know you, but it won't be long before you make acquaintances," Dave consoled him.

"Shut up, or I'll pump lead into you," the ex-convict warned hoarsely.

The cattleman on the bed shook his head. "You'd like to fill me full of buck-shot, but it wouldn't do at all, Dan. I'm the goose that lays the golden eggs in a way of speaking. Gun me, and it's good-by to that twenty thousand in the gunnysack." He turned cheerfully to Rutherford, who was standing in the doorway. "Come right in, Hal. Glad to see you. Make yourself at home."

"He's devilin' me all the time," Meldrum complained to the owner of the horse ranch. "I ain't a going to stand it."

Rutherford looked at the prisoner, a lean hard-bitten Westerner with muscles like steel ropes and eyes unblinking as a New Mexico sun. His engaging recklessness had long since won the liking of the leader of the Huerfano Park outlaws.

"Don't bank on that golden-egg business, Dave," advised Rutherford. "If you tempt the boys enough they're liable to forget it. You've been behaving mighty aggravating to Dan."

"Me?" Dave opened his eyes in surprise. "I was just asking him how he'd like to go back to Santa Fé after you-all turn me loose."

"We're not going to turn you loose till we reach an agreement. What's the use of being pig-headed? We're looking for that gold and we're going to find it mighty soon. Now, be reasonable."

"How do you know you're going to find it?"

"Because we know you couldn't have taken it far. Here's the point. You had it when Fox made his getaway. Beulah was right behind you, so we know you didn't get a chance to bury it between there and town. We covered your tracks and you didn't leave the road in that half-mile. That brings you as far as Battle Butte. You had the gunnysack when you crossed the bridge. You didn't have it when Slim

Sanders met you. So you must have got rid of it in that distance of less than a quarter of a mile. First off, I figured you dropped the sack in Hague's alfalfa field. But we've tromped that all over. It's not there. Did you meet some one and give it to him? Or how did you get rid of it?"

"I ate it," grinned Dingwell confidentially.

"The boys are getting impatient, Dave. They don't like the way you butted in."

"That's all right. You're responsible for my safety, Hal. I'll let you do the worrying."

"Don't fool yourself. We can't keep you here forever. We can't let you go without an agreement. Figure out for yourself what's likely to happen?"

"Either my friends will rescue me, or else I'll escape."

"Forget it. Not a chance of either." Rutherford stopped, struck by an idea. "Ever hear of a young fellow called Cherokee Street?"

"No. Think not. Is he a breed?"

"White man." Rutherford took a chair close to Dingwell. He leaned forward and asked another question in a low voice. "Never happened to meet the son of John Beaudry, did you?"

Dingwell looked at him steadily out of narrowed eyes. "I don't get you, Hal. What has he got to do with it?"

"Thought maybe you could tell me that. He's in the park now."

"In the park?"

"Yes—and Jess Tighe knows it."

"What's he doing here?"

But even as he asked the other man Dingwell guessed the answer. Not an hour before he had caught a glimpse of a white, strained face at the window. He knew now whose face it was.

"He's spying on us and sleuthing for evidence to send us to the pen. Think he'd be a good risk for an insurance company?"

Dave thought fast. "I don't reckon you're right. I put the kid through law school. My friends have likely sent him up here to look for me."

Rutherford scoffed. "Nothing to that. How could they know you are here? We didn't advertise it."

"No-o, but—" Dingwell surrendered the point reluctantly. He flashed a question at Rutherford. "Tighe will murder him. That's sure. You going to let him?"

"Not if I can help it. I'm going to send young Beaudry out of the park."

"Fine. Don't lose any time about it, Hal."

The Huerfano Park rancher made one more attempt to shake his prisoner. His dark eyes looked straight into those of Dingwell.

"Old-timer, what about you? I ain't enjoying this any more than you are. But it's clear out of my hands."

"Then why worry?" asked Dingwell, a little grin on his drawn face.

"Hell! What's the use of asking that? I'm no Injun devil," barked Rutherford irritably.

"Turn me loose and I'll forget all I've seen. I won't give you the loot, but I'll not be a witness against you."

The Huerfano Park ranchman shook his head. "No, we want that gold, Dave. You butted into our game and we won't stand for that."

"I reckon we can't make a deal, Hal." The haggard eyes of the starving man were hard as tungsten steel. They did not yield a jot.

A troubled frown dragged together the shaggy eyebrows of Rutherford as he snapped out his ultimatum. "I like you, Dave. Always have. But you're in one hell of a hole. Don't feed yourself any fairy tales. Your number is chalked up, my friend. Unless you come through with what we want you'll never leave here alive. I can't save you. There's only one man can—and that is your friend, David Dingwell."

The other man did not bat an eyelid. "Trying to pass the buck, Hal? You can't get away with it—not for a minute." A gay little smile of derision touched his face. "I'm in your hands completely. I'll not tell you a damn thing. What are you going to do about it? No, don't tell me that Meldrum and Tighe will do what has to be done. You're the high mogul here. If they kill me, Hal Rutherford will be my murderer. Don't forget that for a second."

Rutherford carried home with him a heavy heart. He could see no way out of the difficulty. He knew that neither Meldrum nor Tighe would consent to let Dingwell go unless an agreement was first reached. There was, too, the other tangle involving young Beaudry. Perhaps he also would be obstinate and refuse to follow the reasonable course.

Beulah met him on the road. Before they had ridden a hundred yards her instinct told her that he was troubled.

"What is it, dad?" she asked.

He compromised with himself and told her part of what was worrying him. "It's about your friend Street. Jess had him looked up in Denver. The fellow turns out to be a Royal Beaudry. You've heard of a sheriff of that name who used to live in this country? Well, this is his son."

"What's he doing here?"

"Trying to get us into trouble, I reckon. But that ain't the point. I'm not worrying about what he can find out. Fact is that Tighe is revengeful. This boy's father crippled him. He wants to get even on the young fellow. Unless Beaudry leaves the park at once he'll never go. I left word at Rothgerber's for him to come down and see me soon as he gets home."

"Will he come?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know. If not, I'll go up and fetch him. I don't trust Jess a bit. He'll strike soon and hard."

"Don't let him, dad," the girl implored.

The distressed eyes of the father rested on her. "You like this young fellow, honey?" he asked.

She flamed. "I hate him. He abused our hospitality. He lied to us and spied on us. I wouldn't breathe the same air he does if I could help it. But we can't let him be killed in cold blood."

"Tha's right, Boots. Well, he'll come down to-day and I'll pack him back to Battle Butte. Then we'll be shet of him."

Beulah passed the hours in a fever of impatience. She could not keep her mind on the children she was teaching. She knew Tighe. The decision of her father to send Beaudry away would spur the cripple to swift activity. Up at Rothgerber's Jess could corner the man and work his ven-

geance unhampered. Why did not the spy come down to the horse ranch? Was it possible that his pride would make him neglect the warning her father had left? Perhaps he would think it only a trap to catch him.

Supper followed dinner, and still Beaudry had not arrived. From the porch Beulah peered up the road into the gathering darkness. Her father had been called away on business. None of her brothers were at home. The girl could stand it no longer. She went to the stable and saddled Blacky.

Five minutes later she was flying up the road that led to the Rothgerber place.

CHAPTER XII.

STARK FEAR.

WHEN Beaudry climbed the cañon wall to the Rothgerber pasture he breathed a deep sigh of relief. For many hours he had been under a heavy strain, nerves taut as fiddle-strings. Fifty times his heart had jumped with terror. He had done the thing he had set out to do.

He had stiffened his flaccid will and spurred his trembling body forward. If he had been unable to control his fear, at least he had not let it master him. He had found out for Ryan where Dingwell was held prisoner. It had been his intention to leave the park as soon as he knew this, report the facts to the friends of Dave, and let them devise a way of escape. He had done his full share.

But he could not follow this course now.

The need of the cattleman was urgent. Somehow it must be met at once. Yet what could he do against two armed men who would not hesitate to shoot him down if necessary? There must be some way of saving Dingwell if he could only find it.

In spite of his anxiety a fine spiritual exaltation flooded him. So far he had stood the acid test, had come through without dishonor. He might be a coward; at least he was not a quitter. Plenty of men would have done his day's work without a tremor. What brought comfort to Roy's soul was that he had been able to do it at all.

Mrs. Rothgerber greeted him with exclamations of delight. The message of Rutherford had frightened her, even though she did not entirely understand it.

"Herman iss out looking for you. Mr. Rutherford—the one that owns the horse ranch—he wass here and left a message for you."

"A message for me! What was it?"

With many an "*Ach!*" she managed to tell him.

The face of her boarder went white. Since Rutherford was warning him against Tighe the danger must be imminent. Should he go down to the horse ranch now? Or had he better wait until it was quite dark? While he was still debating this with himself the old German came into the house.

"Home, eh? Gut, gut! They are already yet watching the road."

Roy's throat choked. "Who?"

This question Rothgerber could not answer. In the dusk he had not recognized the men he had seen. Moreover, they had ridden into the brush to escape observation. Both of them had been armed with rifles.

The old woman started to light a lamp, but Roy stopped her. "Let's eat in the dark," he proposed. "Then I'll slip out to the bunk-house and you can have your light."

His voice shook. When he tried to eat his fingers could scarcely hold a knife and fork. Supper was for him a sham. A steel band seemed to grip his throat and make the swallowing of food impossible. He was as unnerved as a condemned criminal waiting for the noose.

After drinking a cup of coffee he pushed back his chair and rose.

"Besser stay mit us," urged the old German. He did not know why this young man was in danger, but he read in the face the stark fear of a soul in travail.

"No. I'll saddle and go down to see Rutherford. Good night."

Roy went out of the back door and crept along the shadows of the hill. Beneath his foot a dry twig snapped. It was enough. He fled panic-stricken, pursued by all the demons of hell his fears could evoke. A deadly unnerving terror clutched at his

throat. The pounding blood seemed ready to burst the veins at his temples.

The bunk-house loomed before him in the darkness. As he plunged at the door a shot rang out. A bolt of fire burned into his shoulder. He flung the door open, slammed it shut behind him, locked and bolted it almost with one motion. For a moment he leaned half swooning against the jamb, sick through and through at the peril he had just escaped.

But had he escaped it? Would they not break in on him and drag him out to death? The acuteness of his fright drove away the faintness. He dragged the bed from its place and pushed it against the door. Upon it he piled the table, the washstand, the chairs. Feverishly he worked to barricade the entrance against his enemies.

When he had finished his heart was beating against his ribs like that of a wild rabbit in the hands of a boy. He looked around for the safest place to hide. From the floor he stripped a Navaho rug and pulled up the trap-door that led to a small cellar stairway. Down into this cave he went, letting the door fall shut after him.

In that dark blackness he waited, a crumpled trembling wretch, for whatever fate might have in store for him.

For long and long Beaudry crouched there, but at last reason asserted itself and fought back the panic. To stay where he was would be to invite destruction. His attackers would come to the window. The barricaded door, the displaced rug, the trap-door, would advertise his terror. The outlaws would break in and make an end of him.

Roy could hardly drag his feet up the stairs, so near was he to physical collapse. He listened. No sound reached him. Slowly he pushed up the trap-door. Nobody was in the room. He crept up, lowered the door, and replaced the carpet. With his eyes on the window he put back the furniture where it belonged. Then, revolver in hand, he sat in one corner of the room and tried to decide what he must do.

Down in the cellar he had been vaguely aware of a dull pain in his shoulder and a wet, soggy shirt above the place. But the tenseness of his anxiety had pushed this

into the background of his thoughts. Now again the throbbing ache intruded itself. The fingers of his left hand searched under his waistcoat, explored a spot that was tender and soppy, and came forth moist.

He knew he had been shot, but this gave him very little concern. He had no time to worry about his actual ills since his whole mind was given to the fear of those that were impending.

Upon the window there came a faint tapping. The hand with the revolver jerked up automatically. Every muscle of Beaudry's body grew rigid. His senses were keyed to a tense alertness. He moistened his lips with his tongue as he crouched in readiness for the attack about to break.

Again the tapping—with a low call:

"Mr. Street. Are you there? Let me in!"

He knew that voice—would have known it among a thousand. In another moment he had raised the window softly and Beulah Rutherford was climbing in.

She panted as if she had been running. "They're watching the entrance to the arroyo. I came up through the cañon and across the pasture," she explained.

"Did they see you?"

"No. Think not. We must get out of here."

"How?"

"The same way I came."

"But—if they see us and shoot?"

The girl brushed his objection aside. "We can't help that. They know you're here, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Then they'll rush the house. Come."

Still he hesitated. At least they had the shelter of the house. Outside, if they should be discovered, they would be at the mercy of his foes.

"What are you waiting for?" she asked sharply, and she moved toward the window.

But though he recoiled from going to meet the danger, he could not let a girl lead the way. Beaudry dropped to the ground outside and stood ready to lend her a hand. She did not need one. With a twist of her supple body Beulah came through the opening and landed lightly beside him.

They crept back to the shadows of the hill and skirted its edge. Slowly they worked their way from the bunk-house, making the most of such cover as the chaparral afforded. Farther up they crossed the road into the pasture, and by way of it reached the orchard. Every inch of the distance Roy sweated fear.

She was leading, ostensibly because she knew the lay of the land better. Through the banked clouds the moon was struggling. Its light fell upon her lithe, slender figure, the beautifully poised head, the crown of soft black hair. She moved with the grace and the rhythm of a racing filly stepping from the paddock to the track.

Beaudry had noticed, even in his anxiety, that not once since the tapping on the window had her hand touched his or the sweep of her skirt brushed against his clothes. She would save him if she could, but with an open disdain that dared him to misunderstand.

They picked their course diagonally through the orchard toward the cañon. Suddenly Beulah stopped. Without turning she swept her hand back and caught his. Slowly she drew him to the shadow of an apple tree. There, palm to palm, they crouched together.

Voices drifted to them.

"I'd swear I hit him," one said.

"Maybe you put him out of business. We got to find out," another answered.

"I'll crawl up to the window and take a look," responded the first.

The voices and the sound of the men's movements died. Beulah's hand dropped to her side.

"We're all right now," she said coldly.

They reached the gulch and slowly worked their way down its precipitous sides to the bottom.

The girl turned angrily on Roy. "Why didn't you come after father warned you?"

"I didn't get his warning till night. I was away."

"Then how did you get back up the arroyo when it was watched?"

"I—I wasn't out into the park," he told her.

"Oh!" Her scornful gipsy eyes passed over him and wiped him from the map.

She would not even comment on the obvious alternative.

"You think I've been up at Dan Meldrum's spying," he protested hotly.

"Haven't you?" she flung at him.

"Yes, if that's what you want to call it," came quickly his bitter answer. "The man who has been my best friend is lying up there a prisoner because he knows too much about the criminals of Huerfano Park. I heard Meldrum threaten to kill him unless he promised what was wanted of him. Why shouldn't I do my best to help the man who—"

Her voice, sharpened by apprehension, cut into his. "What man? Who are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about David Dingwell."

"What do you mean that he knows too much? Too much about what?" she demanded.

"About the express robbery."

"Do you mean to say that—that my people—" She choked with anger, but back of her indignation was fear.

"I mean to say that one of your brothers was guarding Dingwell, and that later your father went up to Meldrum's place. They are starving him to get something out of him. I serve warning on you that if they hurt my friend—"

"Starving him!" she broke out fiercely. "Do you dare say that my people—my father would torture anybody? Is that what you mean, you lying spy?"

Her fury was a spur to him. "I don't care what words you use," he flung back wildly. "They have given him no food for three days. I didn't know such things were done nowadays. It's as bad as what the old Apaches did. It's devilish."

He pulled himself up. What right had he to talk that way to the girl who had just saved his life? Her people might be lawbreakers, but he felt she was clean of any wrongdoing.

Her pride was shaken. A more immediate issue had driven it into the background.

"Why should they hurt him?" she asked. "If they had meant to do that—"

"Because he won't tell what he knows—where the gold is—won't promise to keep quiet about it afterward. What else can

they do? They can't turn him loose as a witness against them."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe a word of it!" Her voice broke. "I'm going up to see right away."

"You mean—to-night?"

"I mean now."

She turned up the gulch instead of down. Reluctantly he followed her.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEULAH INTERFERES.

THEY felt their way up in the darkness. The path was rough, and at first pitch-black. After a time they emerged from the aspens into more open travel. Here were occasional gleams of light, as if the moon stood tiptoe and peered down between the sheer walls of Chicito to the obscure depths below.

Beulah led. Mountain-born and bred, she was active as a bighorn. Her slenderness was deceptive. It concealed the pack of her long, rippling muscles, the deep-breasted strength of her torso. One might have marched a long day's journey without finding a young woman more perfectly modeled for grace and for endurance.

"What are you going to try to do?" Beaudry asked of her timidly.

She turned on him with a burst of feminine ferocity. "Is that any of your business? I didn't ask you to come with me, did I? Go down to the horse ranch and ask dad to help you out of the park. Then when you're safe with your friends you can set the officers on him. Tell them he is a criminal—just as you told me."

Her biting tongue made him wince. "If I told you that, I'm sorry. I had no right. You've saved my life. Do you think it likely I would betray your people after that?"

"How do I know what a spy would do? Thank God, I can't put myself in the place of such people!" she answered disdainfully.

He smiled ruefully. She was unjust, of course. But that did not matter. Roy knew that she was wrought up by what he had told her. Pride and shame and hatred and distrust spoke in her sharp words. Was

it not natural that a high-spirited girl should resent such a charge against her people and should flame out against the man who had wounded her? Even though she disapproved of what they had done she should fly to their defense when attacked.

From the dark gash of the ravine they came at last to the opening where Meldrum lived.

The young woman turned to Beaudry. "Give me your revolver belt."

He hesitated. "What are you going to do?"

Plainly she would have liked to rebuff him, but just now he had the whip hand.

"I'm going to tell my brother that father needs him. When he has gone I'll see what I can do."

"And what am I to do while you are inside?"

"Whatever you like." She held out her hand for his belt.

Not at all willingly he unbuckled it. "You'll be careful," he urged. "Meldrum is a bad man. Don't try any tricks with him."

"He knows better than to touch a hair of my head," she assured him with proud carelessness. Then, "Hide in those trees," she ordered.

Ned Rutherford answered her knock on the door of the *jacal*. At sight of her he exclaimed:

"What are you doing here, Boots, at this time of night? Anything wrong?"

"Dad needs you, Ned. It seems there is trouble about that young man Street. Jess Tighe has sworn to kill him and dad won't have it. There's trouble in the air. You're to come straight home."

"Why didn't he send Jeff?"

"He needed him. You're to keep on down through the cañon to the mouth. Jess has the mouth of the arroyo guarded to head off Street."

"But—what's broke? Why should Tighe be so keen on bumping off this pink-ear when dad says no?"

"They've found out who he is. It seems Street is an *alibi*. He is really Royal Beaudry, the son of the man who used to be sheriff of the county, the one who crippled Jess the day he was killed."

The slim youth in the high-heeled boots whistled. He understood now why Tighe dared to defy his father.

"All right, Boots. With you in a minute; soon as I get my hat and let Dan know."

"No. I'm to stay here till dad sends for me. He doesn't want me near the trouble."

"You mean you're to stay at Rothgerber's."

"No, here. Tighe may attack Rothgerber's any time to get this young Beaudry. I heard shooting as I came up."

"But—you can't stay here. What's dad thinking about?" he frowned.

"If you mean because of Mr. Dingwell, I know all about that."

"Who told you?" he demanded.

"Dad can't keep secrets from me. There's no use his trying."

"H-m! I notice he loaded us with a heap of instructions not to let you know anything. He'd better learn to padlock his own tongue."

"Isn't there a room where I can sleep here?" Beulah asked.

"There's a cot in the back room," he admitted sulkily. "But you can't stay—"

"That's just it," she broke out. "Father doesn't want Dan left alone with Mr. Dingwell."

"Who's that out there, Ned?" growled a heavy voice from inside.

Beulah followed her brother into the hut. Two men stared at her in amazement. One sat on the bed with a leg tied to the post. The other was at the table playing solitaire, a revolver lying beside the cards. The card player was Meldrum. He jumped up with an oath.

"Goddlemighty! What's she doing here?" he demanded in his hoarse raucous bass.

"That's her business and mine," Rutherford answered haughtily.

"It's mine too, by God. My neck's in the noose, ain't it?" screamed the former convict. "Has everybody in the park got to know we're hiding Dingwell here? Better put it in the paper. Better—"

"Enough of that, Dan. Dad is running this show. Obey orders, and that lets you

out," retorted the young man curtly. "You've met my sister, haven't you, Dave?"

The cattlemen smiled at the girl. "Sure. We had a little ride together not long since. I owe you a new raincoat. Don't I, Miss Beulah?"

She blushed a little. "No, you don't, Mr. Dingwell. The mud came off after it dried."

"Tha's good." Dave turned to Rutherford. The little devils of mischief were in his eyes. "Chet Fox was with us, but he didn't stay—had an engagement, he said. He was in some hurry to keep it too."

But though he chatted with them gaily the ranchman's mind was subconsciously busy with the new factor that had entered into the problem of his captivity. Why had Rutherford allowed her to come? He could not understand that. Every added one who knew that he was here increased the danger to his abductors.

He knew how fond the owner of the horse ranch was of this girl. It was odd that he had let her become incriminated in his lawless plans. Somehow that did not seem like Hal Rutherford.

One point that stood out like the Map of Texas brand was the effect of her coming upon his chances. To secure their safety neither Tighe nor Meldrum would stick at murder. Ten minutes ago the prudent way out of the difficulty would have been for them to arrange his death by accident. Now this was no longer feasible. When the Rutherford girl had stepped into the conspiracy it became one of finesse and not bloodshed.

Was this the reason that her father had sent her—to stay the hands of his associates already reaching toward the prisoner? There was no question that Meldrum's finger had been itching on the trigger of his revolver for a week. One of the young Rutherfords had been beside him day and night to restrain the man.

Dave was due for another surprise when Ned presently departed after a whispered conference with Meldrum, and left his sister in the hut. Evidently something important was taking place in another part of the park.

From his reflections the cattlemen came to an alert attention. Miss Rutherford was giving Meldrum instructions to arrange her bed in the back room.

The convict hesitated. "I can't leave him here alone with you," he remonstrated surlily.

"Why can't you?" demanded Beulah incisively. "He's tied to the bedpost and I have my gun. I can shoot as straight as you can. What harm can he do me in five minutes? Don't be an idiot, Dan."

Meldrum, grumbling, passed into the back room.

In an instant Beulah was at the table, had drawn out a drawer, and had seized a carving knife. She turned on Dingwell, eyes flashing.

"If I help you to escape will you swear to say nothing that will hurt my father or anybody else in the park?" she demanded in a low voice.

"Yes—if young Beaudry has not been hurt."

"You swear it."

"Yes."

She tossed him the knife and moved swiftly back to the place where she had been standing. "Whatever my father wants you to do you'd better do," she said out loud for the benefit of Meldrum.

Dingwell cut the ropes that bound his leg. "I'm liable to be Dan's guest quite a while yet. Rutherford and I don't quite agree on the terms," he drawled aloud.

Beulah tossed him her revolver. "I'll call Dan, but you're not to hurt him," she whispered.

When Meldrum came in answer to her summons he met the shock of his life. In Dingwell's competent hand was a revolver aimed at his heart.

The man turned savagely to Beulah. "So I'm the goat," he said with a snarling curse. "Rutherford is going to frame me, is he? I'm to go to the pen in place of the whole bunch. Is that it?"

"No, you've guessed wrong. Yore hide is safe this time, Meldrum," the cattlemen explained. "Reach for the roof. No, don't do that. Now turn yore face to the wall."

Dave limped forward and gathered in

the forty-four of the enemy. He also relieved him of his "skinning" knife. With the deft hands of an old roper he tied the man up and flung him on the bed.

This done, Dingwell made straight for the larder. Though he was ravenous, the cattleman ate with discretion. Into his pockets he packed all the sandwiches they would hold.

"Is it true that you—that they didn't give you anything to eat?" asked Beulah, watching.

He looked at her—and lied cheerfully.

"Sho, I got cranky and wouldn't eat. Yore-folks treated me fine. I got my neck bowed. Can't blame them for that, can I?"

"We must be going," she told him. "If you don't get over the pass before morning Tighe might catch you."

He nodded agreement. "You're right, but I've got to look out for young Beaudry. Do you know where he is?"

"He is waiting outside," the girl said stiffly. "Take him away with you. I'll not be responsible for him if he comes back. We don't like spies here."

They found Roy lying against the wall of the hut, his white face shining in the moonlight.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Miss Rutherford sharply.

"I'm all right." Roy managed to rise and lean against the *jacal*. "I see you made it. Mr. Dingwell, my name is Beaudry."

"Glad to know you." The cattleman's strong hand gripped his limp one. "Yore father was the gamest man I ever knew and one of my best friends."

The keen eyes of Beulah had been fastened on Roy. She recalled what she had heard the man say in the orchard. In her direct fashion she flung a question at the young man.

"Are you wounded? Did that man hit you when he fired?"

"It's in my shoulder—just a flesh wound. The bleeding has stopped except when I move."

"Why didn't you say something about it?" she asked impatiently. "Do you think we're clairvoyants? We'd better get

him into the house and look at it, Mr. Dingwell."

They did as she suggested. A bullet had plowed a furrow across the shoulder. Except for the loss of blood the wound was not serious. With the help of Miss Rutherford, which was given as a matter of course and quite without embarrassment, Dave dressed and bandaged the hurt like an expert. In his adventurous life he had looked after many men who had been shot and given first aid to a dozen with broken bones.

Roy winced a little at the pain, but he made no outcry. He was not a baby about suffering. That he could stand as well as another. What shook his nerve was the fear of anticipation, the dread of an impending disaster which his imagination magnified.

"You'd better hurry," he urged two or three times. "Some one might come any minute."

Dave looked at him, a little surprised. "What's the urge, son? We've got two six-guns with us if anybody gets too neighborly."

But Beulah was as keen for the start as Beaudry. She did not want the men escaping from the park to meet with her people. To avoid this rapid travel was necessary.

As soon as Roy was patched up they started.

CHAPTER XIV.

PERSONALLY ESCORTED.

BEFORE they reached the mouth of the cañon Dave was supporting the slack body of his friend. When the party came to the aspens Beulah hurried forward and by the time the two men emerged she was waiting for them with Blacky.

Roy protested at taking the horse, but the girl cut short his objections imperiously.

"Do you think we've only your silly pride to consider? I want you out of the park—where my people can't reach you, I'm going to see you get out. After that I don't care what you do."

Moonlight fell upon the sardonic smile

on the pitifully white face of the young man. "I'm to be personally conducted by the queen of Huerfano. That's great. I certainly appreciate the honor."

With the help of Dingwell he pulled himself to the saddle. The exertion started a spurt of warm blood at the shoulder, but Roy clenched his teeth and clung to the pommel to steady himself. The cattleman led the horse and Beulah walked beside him.

"I can get another pony for you at Cameron's," she explained. "Just above there is a short cut by way of Dolores Sinks. You ought to be across the divide before morning. I'll show you the trail."

What story she told to get the horse from Cameron her companions did not know, but from where they waited in the pines they saw the flickering light of a lantern cross to the stable. Presently Beulah rode up to them on the hillside above the ranch.

By devious paths she led them through chaparral and woodland. Sometimes they followed her over hills and again into gulches. The girl "spelled" Dingwell at riding the second horse, but whether in the saddle or on foot her movements showed such swift certainty that Dave was satisfied she knew where she was going.

Twice she stopped to rest the wounded man, who was now clinging with both hands to the saddle-horn. But the hard gleam of her dark eyes served notice that she was moved by expediency and not sympathy.

It was midnight when at last she stopped near the entrance to the pass.

"The road lies straight before you over the divide. You can't miss it. Once on the other side keep going till you get into the foothills. All trails will take you down," she told Dingwell.

"We're a heap obliged to you, Miss Rutherford," answered Dingwell. "I reckon neither one of us is liable to forget what you've done for us."

She flamed. "I've nothing against you, Mr. Dingwell, but you might as well know that what I've done was for my people. I don't want them to get into trouble. If it hadn't been for that—"

"You'd 'a' done it just the same," the cattleman finished for her with a smile. "You can't make me mad to-night after going the limit for us the way you have."

Beaudry, sagging over the horn of the saddle, added, his word timidly, but the Rutherford girl would have none of his thanks.

"You don't owe me anything, I tell you. How many times have I got to say that it is nothing to me what becomes of you?" she replied, flushing angrily. "All I ask is that you don't cross my path again. Next time I'll let Jess Tighe have his way."

"I didn't go into the park to spy on your people, Miss Rutherford. I went to—"

"I care nothing about why you came." The girl turned to Dingwell, her chin in the air. "Better let him rest every mile or two. I don't want him breaking down in our country after all the trouble I've taken."

"You may leave him to me. I'll look out for him," Dave promised.

"Just so that you don't let him get caught again," she added.

Her manner was cavalier, her tone almost savage. Without another word she turned and left them.

Dingwell watched her slim form disappear into the night.

"Did you ever see such a little thoroughbred?" he asked admiringly. "I take off my hat to her. She's the gamest kid I ever met—and pretty as they grow. Just think of her pulling off this getaway to-night. It was a man-size job, and that little girl never turned a hair from start to finish. And loyal! By gad, Hal Rutherford hasn't earned fidelity like that, even if he has been father and mother to her since she was a year old. He'd ought to send her away from that hell-hole and give her a chance."

"What will they do to her when she gets back?"

Dave chuckled. "They can't do a thing. That's the beauty of it. There will be a lot of tall cussing in Huerfano for a while, but after Hal has unloaded what's on his chest he'll stand between her and the rest."

"Sure of that?"

"It's a cinch." The cattleman laughed softly. "But ain't she the little spitfire? I reckon she sure hates you thorough."

Roy did not answer. He was sliding from the back of his horse in a faint.

When Beaudry opened his eyes again Dingwell was pouring water into his mouth from a canteen that had been hanging to the pommel of Miss Rutherford's saddle.

"Was I unconscious?" asked the young man in disgust.

"That's whatever. Just you lie there, son, whilst I fix these bandages up for you again."

The cattleman moistened the hot cloths with cold water and rearranged them.

"We ought to be hurrying on," Roy suggested, glancing anxiously down the steep ascent up which they had ridden.

"No rush a-tall," Dave assured him cheerfully. "We got all the time there is. Best thing to do is to loaf along and take it easy."

"But they'll be on our trail as soon as they know we've gone. They'll force Miss Rutherford to tell which way we came."

Dingwell grinned. "Son, did you ever look into that girl's eyes? They look right at you, straight and unafraid." The Huerfano Park outfit will have a real merry time getting her to tell anything she doesn't want to. When she gets her neck bowed I'll bet she's some sot. Might as well argue with a government mule. She'd make a right interesting wife for some man, but he'd have to be a humdinger to hold his end up—six foot of man, lots of patience, and sense enough to know he'd married a woman out of 'steen thousand."

Young Beaudry was not contemplating matrimony. His interest just now was centered in getting as far from the young woman and her relatives as possible.

"When young Rutherford finds he has been sold there will be the deuce to pay," urged Roy.

"Will there? I dunno. Old man Rutherford ain't going to be so awfully keen to get us back on his hands. We worried him a heap. Miss Beulah lifted two heavy weights off'n his mind. I'm one and you're the other. O' course he'll start the boys

out after us to square himself with Tighe and Meldrum. He's got to do that. They're sure going to be busy bees down in the Huerfano hive. The Rutherford boys are going to do a lot of night riding for quite some time. But I expect Hal won't give them orders to bring us in dead or alive. There is no premium on our pelts."

Roy spent a nervous half hour before his friend would let him mount again—and he showed it. The shrewd eyes of the old cattleman appraised him. Already he guessed some of the secrets of this young man's heart.

Dave swung to the left into the hills so as to get away from the beaten trails after they had crossed the pass. He rode slowly, with a careful eye upon his companion. Frequently he stopped to rest in spite of Roy's protests.

Late in the afternoon they came to a little mountain ranch owned by a nester who had punched cattle for Dave in the old days. Now he was doing a profitable business himself in other men's calves. He had started with a branding iron and a flexible conscience. He still had both of them, together with a nice little bunch of cows that beat the world's record for fecundity.

It was not exactly the place Dingwell would have chosen to go into hiding, but he had to take what he could get. Roy, completely exhausted, was already showing a fever. He could not possibly travel farther.

With the casual confidence that was one of his assets Dave swung from his horse and greeted the ranchman.

"Lo, Hart! Can we roost here tonight? My friend got thrown and hurt his shoulder. He's all in."

The suspicious eyes of the nester passed over Beaudry and came back to Dingwell.

"I reckon so," he said, not very graciously. "We're not fixed for company, but if you'll put up with what we've got,—"

"Suits us fine. My friend's name is Beaudry. I'll get him right to bed."

Roy stayed in bed for forty-eight hours. His wound was only a slight one and the fever soon subsided. The third day he was sunning himself on the porch. Dave had

gone on a little jaunt to a water hole to shoot hooters for supper. Mrs. Hart was baking bread inside. Her husband had left before daybreak and was not yet back. He was looking for strays, his wife said.

In the family rocking chair Roy read a torn copy of "Martin Chuzzlewit." How it had reached this haven was a question, since it was the only book in the house except a Big Creek Bible, as the catalogue of a mail order house is called in that country.

Beaudry resented the frank insolent observations of Dickens on the manners of Americans. In the first place the types were not true to life. In the second place—

The young man heard footsteps coming around the corner of the house. He

glanced up carelessly—and his heart seemed to stop beating.

He was looking into the barrel of a revolver pointed straight at him. Back of the weapon was the brutal, triumphant face of Meldrum. It was set in a cruel grin that showed his tobacco-stained teeth.

"By God, I've got you! Git down on yore knees and beg, Mr. Spy. I'm going to blow yore head off in just thirty seconds."

Not in his most unbridled moments had Dickens painted a bully so appalling as this one. The man was a notorious "killer," and the lust of murder was just now on him. Young Beaudry's brain reeled. It was only by an effort that he pulled himself back from the unconsciousness into which he was swimming.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.



The June Changes Key

by Herman
Howard
Matteson

IN former days, among the Siwashes of the San Juan Islands of far lower Puget Sound, a favorite pastime was called "la-piege," or "the man-trap." Half a dozen husky braves would spring open the crotch of a fir or cedar tree, insert the left hand of a captive and permit the branches to fly shut. Then in the free right hand of the victim they would place a sharp knife.

This was a sport truly royal, and gave

the prisoner a chance to demonstrate whether he possessed what the savages called "skookum tum-tum." One with skookum tum-tum aplenty would saw off the left hand at the wrist; then, if he didn't faint away and bleed to death, bind up the stump with a deer thong and some kelp ribbon, and probably live.

But this was in a former day. Now in the San Juan we have only the descendants of the artists of the man-trap; a few pure of

blood, more that are half breeds and quarter breeds.

With the exception of Nika Henry, and of course the mistress of the place, the help in the summer hotel at Prevost, of Stuart Island, were Siwash, part or entire. Nika waited table in the dining-room. They called her "head waitress." Her helpers were Oblega Iotte and Nanoose Witka. The cook was a half-breed, a very good one too, and clean, and the two chambermaids were breeds. The man-of-all-work about the place was Leery Bledsoe, also a half-breed.

The designation, "man-of-all-work," was a title more honorary than real. Leery reduced work to the point of the vanishing minimum. His real employment, which must have been furtive and mysterious in character, took him abroad often at night, in the dark of the moon, in a dory.

Nika, the white girl, had a lover, Pink Ellis, who owned and operated the shrimp boat Blossom. Nika and Pink planned to be married presently. They had drawn and redrawn plans for a twenty-eight foot cabin with a cedar shake roof. Upon the floor of the front room there was to be, Pink insisted, an ingrain carpet with "plenty of red into it." Nika, for her part, proposed to have some aluminum cooking utensils like those in the hotel, a kitchen cabinet, and a what-not for the corner.

Scores of times they had built the cabin in fancy; furnished it, and moved in. Why, Pink had even gone to the bold length of pointing out to the blushing Nika places in the carpet worn bare by the stubby toes of little creeping shoes, attempting ambitious expeditions across the floor.

Nika, to be sure, was an object of envy. Pink was a fine young fellow, owned his own boat and gear, and made money. Oblega, Nanoose, Leery Bledsoe, even the landlady treated Nika with fawning deference.

Then suddenly, for some inscrutable reason, the perplexity alike of scientist and fisherman, the shrimp forsook the lines that they had been traveling for many a year. When the shrimp move from one deep-sea location to another unknown, it is obviously futile and foolish to dredge for them where

they are not. There remains the task of locating the new lines, an operation tedious and expensive, for in the scouting the iron shod dredge, dangling at the end of a hundred fathoms of steel cable, will encounter uncharted rocks, coral clusters, the roots of kelp.

A fourteen-foot shrimp-dredge and cable costs a thousand dollars. Pink lost a dredge, then a second. In cash he had remaining about the price of a third dredge, which was also the fund which had been laid aside for the cabin, the red ingrain carpet and the what-not for the corner.

"Good news rides in on an ebb tide," say the Indians; "bad news flies with the gale."

Bledsoe, who had been abroad all night, whispered it to Oblega, and Oblega whispered it to Nanoose.

"You aim to give a dance at your wedding, Nika?" maliciously demanded Oblega, entering the dining-room and trying to walk straight-toed like a white girl, and not pigeon-toed like a Siwash. "You and Pink have talked so big we all been lookin' for a bang up, *hee-hee*. 'Course it takes money, the music, ice-cream, chuck, and so forth."

"That's right," put in Nanoose Witka. "I'm kind of mad-like that you hain't asked me to stand up with you. When does work on the palace begin?"

Nika smiled bravely. "Never you mind. You'll all know when I'm to get married. And speakin' of weddin's, I hain't saw no announcement of yourn yet, Nan, or you either, Obie. Far as the dance goes, the one I and Pink pull off wouldn't interest you none; we don't aim to give no warden-dance."

But the brave smile faded when the breakfast hour was over, and Nika had repaired to her attic room. At noon, in spite of repeated bathing in cold water, her eyes were a bit red. The afternoon wore away and it was time for the evening meal.

Before descending to the dining-room Nika took a last look from the attic window. Away in the offing she made out the smoke and the pudgy lines of Pink's boat, the Blossom. It was heading in.

Grave misgivings assailed her as she entered the dining-room, tying her little white

apron about her round waist. Then, in spite of herself, the tears came to her eyes, hot tears of hurt, humiliated pride. Nanoose and Oblega, the instant that the white girl entered, clasped hands, then placed each a palm upon the forehead of the other, pantomime of a Siwash wedding ceremony.

"It's none of your business," she stormed angrily, "when I am going to be married! It's none of your business when, but I'll just tell you two smarties to show you you hain't as smart as you think—I'm goin' to be married now, right away—yet to-day. There!"

Nika, reputed best dining-room girl in any hotel of the islands, dropped dishes, drenched a guest or two with scalding soup, tipped a bowl of butter pats and cracked ice onto the floor, threw off her apron, and ran crying hysterically to her attic room.

An hour later, dressed in her simple blue gingham, she descended the stairs quietly, emerging by a rear door. Coon Stripe, Pink's helper, came lurching by, a battered, papier-mâché suit-case in one hand, a roll of blankets in the other.

"Why, Coon!" she exclaimed.

Coon lowered the suit-case and the roll of blankets to the earth. "I'm quittin'," he said—"fired. Pink's to the end of his hawse. He couldn't pay me wages no more, he said."

The girl came up beside him and looked anxiously into his face. "I—I wonder why Pink didn't come up. You've been at dock way over an hour."

Coon Stripe shook his head. "Worried, bad worried, that's what Pink is. Don't I know Pink? Why, I can tell. There hain't ary a gage set to a b'iler that's plainer than when Pink takes down one of his four ocarinas to play a tune. When he's glad, he takes the little, shrill ocarina, the key of C, and plays lively. When he's all busted up over something, Pink always plays on the big, mournful one, the key of B flat. Last two nights, Pink's played on the big one, 'Darling, I am growin' old,' till I was ready to cut my throat and jump into the salt chuck. Pink's worried."

Nika was staring off over the bay.

"And why not?" continued Coon pick-

ing up his burden. "Why, look. To-day fixes things for good. After losin' two dredges, Pink he don't feel like buyin' a third for some reason. So he gambles. He borries a dredge offen Otie Benn to Anacortes, guaranteein' to pay for same if anything happens. To-day we lost it. 'Course Pink's got still a old dredge that might be patched. But he can't work ship alone. I offered to stay on, wages or no wages, but Pink, actin' about half mad, said no and handed me my money. Then he takes down the key of B and starts in. I never seen Pink look glummer, or heard a dolefuller tune."

Nika gazed after Pink as he walked up the road a distance and turned into Tony's little general store.

Acting queer, Pink acting queer! Nika understood. Sometimes it is easier to show that one has plenty of skookum tum-tum, to win from the man-trap with a keen knife-blade, than to sit by at the torture of one's pride. Nika understood.

Slowly, thoughtfully, she turned back to the house, climbed to her room where she gathered her few belongings and wrapped them into a little bundle. Down the stairs she went, entering the kitchen, where the mistress was listening with a grin as Oblega and Nanoose rehearsed the mock Siwash wedding. A betraying silence ensued.

"I'm on my way to get married," announced Nika, giving the Indians a defiant glare, "right away, now, to-night. I'm sorry I can't invite you girls, but this is goin' to be a select weddin'. I'm quittin', Mrs. Brennan. If I got any wages due, just use it to buy a bucket of war paint for Nan and Obie. I'm goin'."

Nika closed the door after her with a bang. Treading softly in her rubber soled shoes, she made her way down the dock to where the Blossom lay alongside.

The further she walked, the more slowly she walked. Her face began to burn in the darkness. Was this bold, unmaidenly? All the rules said yes; her heart said no. If Pink was in distress, worried, her place was at his side. She knew boats, Nika did. They could patch up the old dredge. Pink could fire the big wood-burning boiler, and she could steer; she knew the shrimp lines.

Pink had their marriage license, had had it for weeks, she knew. The boat preacher tied up always at night at Deer Harbor, an hour's run from Prevost. They'd be married at once. They could live on board the Blossom for the time till better luck came. Then the cabin, the ingrain carpet, the what-not, and—

As she came opposite the broad stern of the Blossom where a canopy extended over the hoisting winch, the steam hose and the vat in which the freshly taken shrimp were cooked, her courage forsook her. It didn't seem nearly so easy now to walk in on Pink as it had when her outraged pride had egged her on. No, decidedly it wasn't so easy.

Softly she stepped from the dock stringer onto the Blossom's after deck. There it was pitch-dark. She could pause, collect her wits, think it over. Suddenly she caught the sound of voices issuing from the fire-hold. Nika bent her head and listened, terror like a hand reaching from the dark, clutching at her throat, choking her. The voices were those of Leery Bledsoe, the half-breed, and Pink.

"Safe?" demanded Bledsoe blusteringly. "Why, Pink, it's like lickin' a sick water rat. All you've got to have is sand. You never seen any one make out without sand, Pink."

"Oh, I know," replied Pink wearily. "Just the same, if we get grabbed I know what it means."

"Grabbed! You afraid, Pink? It's safe as a church, Pink. Who'd ever think of a tub of a shrimper like the Blossom goin' on—goin' on the job?"

For some moments neither of the men in the fire-hold spoke further. Her hand clutched into the bosom of her gingham dress, Nika waited, breathlessly.

"All right, Leery; I'll go you. I couldn't be in no worse fix than I am. I'll go you. Four bells sharp—to-night—ten o'clock. When she's five minutes of ten, I'll douse the lights, cast off and get into the pilot house. You wait up to the end of the dock, and when you see the lights go off, if all's clear, hurry down. Get into the fire-hold. Don't choke her, Leery; just keep enough wood in the box to keep the fire goin' good. Four bells sharp."

Nika crouched against the house as a burly form mounted the ladder from the fire-hold, leaped to the dock and hurried away. Presently Pink followed to the deck. Nika heard him sigh abysmally as he went forward to the pilot house. He entered and snapped on the little binnacle light.

Gone, forever gone her dream of the cabin, the red ingrain carpet and the what-not in the corner. In a flash, back over the years went her thoughts, to other days, days more terrible even than these latter ones. In a cell at MecNeil Island, a federal prisoner, her father had died a smuggler. Within a twelve-month her mother had followed. And now Pink—Leery Bledsoe, cunning, unscrupulous, had hunted Pink out as a buzzard follows a wounded deer to a covert, had tempted him, and Pink had fallen.

Pink, a smuggler! Gone, forever gone her dream. Marry a smuggler, live in terror night and day, watching the clock march its tedious rounds, wondering, dreading, fearing—never!

Noiselessly she stepped from the after deck and crept up the wharf. Where was she going? She didn't know. That wedding announcement had been a trifle premature. Of course she couldn't return to the hotel. She would jump into the bay first. She'd go somewhere, it didn't matter, but a long way off.

She had reached nearly the land end of the long dock approach when a doleful sound came wailing through the night's stillness. Pink was playing upon the ocarina, the big, sad one, the B flat; and the tune was, "Darling, I am growing old, silver threads among the gold."

Growing old. Pink was twenty-eight. Still, in a prison cell, one year was as ten—twenty in the free, untrammelled open. The tears streamed down her cheeks onto the bosom of the blue gingham dress.

And now came a hot flush of shame to dry these tears. What had betrayed honest, hard-working Pink into a bargain with the notorious Bledsoe? Why, *she* had, she and the cabin, and the ingrain carpet, and the what-not for the corner! An honest, more generous, more loving heart than Pink's never beat.

Plain enough. The pride that had driven her from the hotel, that had goaded her into making her wedding announcement, had delivered Pink into the hands of the Siwash smuggler. And she was running away into the night, without even so much as a word of friendly warning.

She turned, hurried down the dock. Still Pink was droning away the doleful tune in B flat.

The wire-bound rubber hose which conveyed the scalding steam from the boiler to the cooking vat lay coiled beside the hoisting winch. Inside this coil she secreted her bundle. Dropping to her hands and knees she made her way cautiously along the runway to the pilot house. Slowly she lifted her head until the cabin clock came into view. Two bells, nine o'clock. She had an hour, exactly an hour.

Back she crept, seated herself upon the coil, gathered her head into her hands and thought as she had never thought before.

Many, many times Nika had been aboard the Blossom. She knew the pudgy craft from stem to stern. On the Blossom an arrangement common among shrimp craft, the galley lay forward in the V-shaped, low-decked forecastle. Entrance to the galley was gained by a lifting hatch which opened in the deck forward of the pilot house. This hatch was provided with a strong drop hasp, and a ring for a padlock. The galley was as far removed from the fire-hold as the length of the ship would permit, was double planked, and was lighted by but two tiny port lights.

Time was getting precious, so Nika, creeping from the stern to the dock, walked cautiously for a distance, then gathered her skirts about her and ran with all her might. Tony, the store-keeper, lived in the rear of his establishment. A light was burning; he was up. Nika knocked, and Tony came to the door.

"Will you do something for me, Tony, and never, never tell a living soul?"

Tony blinked his gray eyes and nodded his gray head. "Sure. What it is, Nika?"

Nika asked for a pencil and a bit of paper, wrote swiftly, folded it up. "Watch, Tony. If the Blossom pulls out from the dock at four bells, open this note, read it

and do what it says to do. If the Blossom don't pull out, burn up the paper. Will you Tony? And never, never tell?"

Tony would never, never tell. He took the folded paper, thrust it into a pocket and glanced at his huge silver watch. It was half after nine.

Back Nika hurried to the shrimp boat. Again she had to crawl her way past that pilot house. Pink was still torturing the ocarina.

Crouching to keep her head out of the zone of light which fell athwart the hatch, she reached it, undid the hasp, lifted the hatch and crept back.

Scarcely had the girl regained her hiding place on the after deck when Pink laid aside the instrument, emerged from the pilot house, walked to the fire-hold ladder and descended. Nika heard him thrust several sticks of wood into the fire-box and adjust the draft. A rumble in the Blossom's vast interior told that steam was getting up.

As Pink left the fire-hold and made his way back to the pilot house, Nika followed him with catlike tread.

Always when at sea Pink kept the forward hatch closed to safeguard the galley stores from the ingress of smashing seas. Nika had counted upon him discovering the open state of the hatch which he did. He stared at it a moment. He would have sworn that he had closed it.

He walked forward and peered down into the galley's black interior. From experience Pink knew that a hungry Siwash will take chances to acquire a slab of bacon, or an armful of tinned stuff. Pink set his feet upon the ladder, descended, snapped on the light. With a loud bang the hatch closed over his head, and the hasp fell into place.

She'd done it! Nothing short of an hour's work with an ax would liberate a man from the jail-like galley. And in the galley, Nika knew, was no implement larger than a bread-knife.

She bent her head to listen. Pink was heaving with his shoulder against the hatch, muttering ungentle words. Then he called, but his cries died away to nothingness against the double planking, calked and pitched within and without.

There came the crash of breaking glass.

Pink had struck out a port light. This would never do. Considering the venture in hand, Pink would hardly call out, but still he might.

Nika looked at the cabin clock. Nearly four bells. She'd chance it. Running to the fire-hold she turned on a steam valve, above the hiss of which no ordinary sound would be audible. If she could but get away from the dock, though Pink had the lungs of Stentor, no cry would penetrate from galley to fire-hold.

Nearly ten. Nika enveloped herself in a tarpaulin coat of Pink's which she found in the pilot house, and clapped a rubber sou'wester upon her head. Then she cast off the forward hawser and waited.

Heavy footsteps, obviously trying to disguise themselves as light ones, were coming down the dock, and the burly form of Leery Bledsoe came into sight. Nika cast off the stern line and hurried into the pilot house. Without a word, as per agreement, Leery climbed down into the fire-hold, shut off the escaping steam and started the engine.

From Prevost dock to the international line is a mile and a half, and a mile and a half further is Tilly's Point, on Pender Island on the Canadian side. Straight for Tilly's Point went the Blossom. Once or twice Bledsoe thrust his head out over the

How maddeningly slow the old shrimp tub was! Another minute now, seconds—the thing ahead was looming up, a long craft with a ridiculously oversized smoke-stack. Just a few seconds more, a few—

Bledsoe poked his head from the side, took one look ahead and flung over the lever, sending the Blossom full speed astern.

"Hell's fire!"

With a roar he sprang from the hold, ran to the pilot house and nearly yanked the door from the hinges.

"Put her over! Revenuers ahead! What—"

Then his eyes fell upon the pale, girlish face beneath the rubber sou'wester.

"What! Hell's fire!"

Nika reached for the whistle cord and gave it three short yanks. Bledsoe, with an animal-like cry, seized her with brutal hands and tore her grasp from the tiller spokes. She fought him like a tigress, clung to him, but he struck loose her hands, dragged her to the rail and flung her over the side.

The Blossom was yawing badly. Bledsoe spun the wheel, jumped for the fire-hold and sent her forward. The Blossom, at a standstill from having been reversed, gathered speed slowly.

Old Larry invented the system of tving hand and foot all Chinese being "shoved" at

"Murderer! Monster! You shall not! I'll do it, Bledsoe! So help me God, I'll do it!"

The salt water puddling all about her, Nika, who had scrambled onto the craft's low-hung after deck, stood with the steam hose in one hand, the other laid to the pet-cock that would loose its destroying stream.

"So help me, Bledsoe, if you do, you'll never look on sea or sky again!"

With a cry of fear, Bledsoe fell back against the house. "Why, Nika, you wouldn't—"

The revenuer was alongside. In a moment the handcuffs were upon Bledsoe's thick wrists, and with the four Chinese he was loaded onto the deck of the government boat.

"My compliments, young lady," said the lieutenant, bowing to Nika. "Pretty work. I got the telephone message. Old Tony said he was talking for you. Very neat. There's a thousand dollars in this job for you. Very neat. Can you make dock alone, or shall I send a man aboard to help?"

"No, no," expostulated Nika a bit eagerly, "I can make dock easily. About the thousand—how soon?"

The lieutenant laughed. "Soon, very soon, within a week. Uncle Sam pays all debts promptly. Within a week. Good-by."

The cutter steamed away. Nika walked forward and stared down at the hatch. Then she lifted the hasp, and Pink crawled to the deck. He started to speak, but Nika stayed him with uplifted hand.

"Pink, you got two dollars with you?"

Pink was staring about him wildly. "Why yes, that's about all I have got, too. Say, I'd like— What—"

"Never mind, Pink."

"But Nika! Now you know, I—"

"Not a word, Pink. I understand. And we'll never, never speak of it again as long as we live. Now, do you know where you're bound for, Pink? Well, seein' you got two dollars, I'll tell you—we're headin' for the boat preacher at Deer Harbor."

On went the Blossom. Pink fired the boiler, then ran to the pilot house and took the pilot into his arms and kissed her, a procedure for which there is neither sanction nor precedence in the mariner's regulations.

Then Pink took down the smallest, shrillest ocarina, and played a tune in the key of C.



Suspense

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Between Heaven and Earth," "Mystery of the Poison Pen," "Eyes That Saw Not," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

BETTY SHAW, a pretty girl, but whose face was marred by a birthmark on her cheek, advertised for a position as companion-secretary, and accepted a position with a Mrs. Atterbury, widow of a wealthy banker, living on the North Drive. At her employer's house she met several odd persons, among them a Mme. Speranza Cimmino and Jack Wolvert; she also made friends with a huge dog—Demon. The first day, while attending to her secretarial duties, she answered Mrs. Atterbury's private phone, and received from Wolvert an odd and inexplicable message intended for her employer; also, by mistake, she opened a letter which was obviously a cipher, and the next day, while being fitted for some dresses, the mild little seamstress, Miss Pope, surreptitiously showed her a pincushion on which the pins were arranged to form the words, "Go away." Betty was amazed, but Mrs. Atterbury being present she could ask no questions.

That night she was awakened by a muffled crash from down-stairs. Slipping on a dressing-gown she stole down to the dining-room. The room was in disorder, and on the floor lay the body of a man stabbed through the breast and obviously dead. Horrified and frightened, she hurried back to her room, and spent the rest of the night in terror; but when she went down to breakfast all signs of the tragedy had vanished, and not a word was said about it by any one.

At about the same time Mme. Dumois, an elderly and peppery lady, appeared at the office of the McCormick Detective Agency and engaged a man to search for a young girl who had disappeared. Herbert Ross, a young and clever operative, was assigned to the case, but the information he was able to extract from Mme. Dumois was very meager. He did learn, however, that the girl was an ardent student of Egyptology, and, following this clue, advertised for a translator of papyri. Betty answered, but the scar on her face (which the missing girl did not have) seemed conclusive to eliminate her, though in other respects she resembled the photograph Mme. Dumois had provided.

Several times Betty was sent on mysterious errands by Mrs. Atterbury. Once to the opera, where she received surreptitiously a sealed envelope from a stranger in the next box; again to a café, where she was to meet a certain woman, but instead was met by a man, who, following instructions, she refused to recognize. Also, she came across another cipher letter, which, after much difficulty, she managed to decode. She likewise learned from the papers a photograph being printed—that the murdered man she had seen in the dining-room, and whose body was afterward found blocks from the house, was George W. Breckinridge, a millionaire clubman.

Finally, she was sent again to meet the girl she had once missed, this time to a high-class hotel. The girl came, handed her a long envelope with every evidence of contempt and fear and, turning, hurried away. But at the door she paused, her golden head erect.

"Remember!" she cried; "tell those who sent you I shall have nothing more to do with this affair. If a further attempt is made to drag me into it, I shall kill myself. I am almost mad now, but I have kept my wretched compact; see to it that you keep yours."

Betty stood staring after her a moment. Then abruptly thrusting the envelope into her muff she turned and made her way to the street.

CHAPTER XVII.

ROSS ASKS QUESTIONS.

THE rain was falling in torrents, hard driven before the gusty March wind, and turning the gutters into miniature foam-crested freshets when Betty struggled up the steps of the Egyptological Museum, with the completed translation beneath her arm.

The attendant who took possession of her dripping umbrella stared curiously at her unveiled face, and his gaze followed her as she ascended to the upper floor, but Betty was oblivious to the interest her presence created. Her thoughts were traveling ahead of her down the corridor to the office numbered nine and the friendly, laughing-eyed young man who awaited her there.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 6.

The hour of her previous visit was the one bright spot in the gloom and mystery which had surrounded her since she made her entrance into Mrs. Atterbury's service, and his protective concern when she had rushed blindly into his arms at that unexpected meeting almost at the gates of her new home lingered comfortingly in her memory.

As she entered, Herbert Ross rose from behind his desk with extended hand and a beaming face.

"You are punctual, Miss Shaw, in spite of the rain. How is the work coming on?"

"It is finished." Betty laid the roll of manuscript upon the desk before him. "I hope that it will prove satisfactory, Mr. Ross."

"You found it difficult?" He spread the papers out, glancing over them rapidly as he spoke.

"No. I have translated almost literally as you can see—but I forgot that you were not an Egyptologist yourself."

"Nevertheless I am sure this will be an admirable addition to our collection of translated papyri. What sonorous, mouth-filling phrases the old chaps used in those days!" He quoted from her page: "'Hail ye living ones upon earth, ye who pass on the Nile, scribes all, readers and priests of the *ka* all, this the great Pharaoh and royal Xerxes, triumphant.' I will place this at once in the hands of the keeper of antiquities."

He pressed a button in the wall beside him, then abruptly swung his chair around until he faced her. His eyes had narrowed slightly, and there was no longer a hint of a smile about his firm lips.

"Miss Shaw, you told me when you were last here that your time was not wholly your own. Does that mean that you are employed at indeterminate hours? I ask this in reference to future work, of course."

Betty nodded, and moistened her lips nervously.

"I did most of this translating at night."

"Ah! You are free, then, in the evenings? What is the nature of your work, if I may ask? Are you a teacher?"

A knock upon the door saved her from an immediate reply. A uniformed atten-

dant entered, and to him Herbert Ross entrusted the manuscript with instructions to take it to Professor Carmody. When the door had closed once more he turned to her inquiringly and noted a swift pallor which seemed to have blotted all the wind-blown color from her face.

"You teach?" he repeated.

Betty shook her head. She dared not risk his asking where she taught if she took refuge in that evasion. The truth, or at least as much of it as was possible under the circumstances, would be safest.

"I am a—a visiting secretary."

"Indeed. That explains your presence on the North Drive the other day when you literally ran into me." His lips relaxed. "You told me you were late for an appointment, I remember. You are not living at present at the address which you gave me, Miss Shaw."

It was neither question nor accusation, but a mere statement of fact casually uttered, and yet a bombshell could not more effectively have stunned the girl. Could her former landlady have betrayed her? Her head whirled and it seemed another voice than hers which replied quietly:

"No. I am staying temporarily at the home of my employer, but I have my mail sent to my permanent address."

"I see. You are not a native of the city, then? Your home is not here?"

What did this continued catechism portend? In so far as the translating provided an excuse for this insistent young man's questions she would reply, but her personal affairs and former life were surely no concern of a museum director.

"No, my home is not here." She paused deliberately. "Perhaps, if this translation proves satisfactory, and you have other work for me, Mr. Ross, you will mail it. I will arrange to have it forwarded—"

She got no further, for the door was suddenly flung wide, and a shriveled, gray little man precipitated himself into the room. With bent shoulders and head thrust forward, he peered eagerly at the younger man through thick tortoise-shell glasses and demanded in a voice crackling with excitement:

"Ross, who is she? The young woman

you said had undertaken this translation for you? I must see her—"

"She is here." The young man rose.

"Miss Shaw, allow me to present Professor Carmody."

The girl bowed distantly, but the little professor advanced to her with outstretched hands.

"My dear young lady, I want to congratulate—" He stopped abruptly, amazement and a dawning recognition in his eyes. "It can't be—is it possible—"

"You find my translation satisfactory, then, Professor Carmody?" Betty darted a swift glance at him, and then turned her head sharply as if to gaze from the window. This move presented her profile to the near-sighted eyes bent upon her, and brought the scar out with cruel distinctness upon her cheek.

Professor Carmody halted, stammering, and the look of expectancy died from his wizen face.

"I beg your pardon. I fancied for a moment that I had met you before. I intruded just now, Miss—Miss—"

"Betty Shaw." The girl prompted him steadily.

"Miss Shaw, I wanted to tell you that your work is admirable! The translation is masterly, and I doubt if even my friend, Professor Mallory himself, could have improved upon it. You have kept to the text with extraordinary fidelity, and retained the spirit as well as the letter to a marked degree!"

"Thank you." In spite of herself, Betty flushed at the fervent praise, but she kept her face averted. "The work was intensely interesting, but I feared I had forgotten a great deal."

"Miss Shaw studied with an associate of Professor Mallory," Ross remarked.

"Really. I should have believed her to have been a pupil of the great man himself." Professor Carmody's eyes still glistened with enthusiasm. "I shall be happy to show you several original papyri of profound interest, if you will call some morning, my dear Miss Shaw. In this intensely modern age, it is a genuine pleasure to encounter a young person who appreciates the wisdom and greatness of the past."

He bowed and had turned to the door when Herbert Ross stopped him with a reminder.

"You, er—you have the check, professor?"

"Bless me, of course!" The little man fumbled in his pocket for a moment, then drew out a narrow slip of paper which he laid upon the desk. "There are one or two inscriptions from tombs of the eleventh dynasty, I believe, which have been awaiting translation. You will find them in that drawer, there. Good afternoon, Miss Shaw."

When the sound of his quick, nervous footsteps had died away down the corridor, Ross handed the check to Betty. It was made out for one hundred and fifty dollars, and signed by the secretary of the Egyptological Society. Thanking him, the girl placed it in her hand-bag and rose.

"Would you care to undertake some more translation immediately?" the young man asked, opening the drawer tentatively.

"I should, very much," Betty responded, her eyes alight with eagerness.

"In that case, it will be necessary for me to have your present address, Miss Shaw." There was no mistaking the businesslike finality in his tone, and Betty hesitated. If she refused, she would not only forfeit the translating, which was a fascinating study, but she might never again see this young man, her only link with the world beyond Mrs. Atterbury's forbidding gates. On the other hand, her reticence would undoubtedly arouse his curiosity and suspicion, and if he were sufficiently interested, he might institute awkward inquiries and precipitate the very crisis she sought to avoid. Would frankness be her wisest course?

"Mr. Ross, I gave you the address of my boarding-house because I have undertaken this translation unknown to my present employer. I work at it only in my leisure hours, but I do not think she would approve of my doing anything which lay outside of her own immediate interests. She is Mrs. Atterbury, of three hundred and thirty-five North Drive. However, I should like all communications sent to the first address I gave you."

Herbert Ross drew his hand quickly across his forehead, and there was an odd, repressed note in his voice.

"I quite understand. You will remain for some little time in your present position? I believe you said it was temporary."

"I—I cannot tell." Betty's tone was very low, and her eyes wandered restlessly to the door. "I shall have finished this translation, at any rate, before I leave."

"Very well." He rose and held out his hand to her. "Bring it to me, please, when it is completed. The terms will be the same as before. I wish you the best of luck with it, Miss Shaw."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CROSSROADS.

WHEN Betty had gone Ross dropped back into his chair and sat for some minutes lost in a profound reverie, which, judging by his frown, was not a happy one. At length he struck the desk an emphatic blow with his fist as if to register some vital decision, and springing to his feet he started precipitately for the sanctum of Professor Carmody.

"My dear Ross!" The gray little man glanced up in mild deprecation from a heap of yellowed parchments as the other burst in upon him. "I trust my abrupt intrusion on your conference did not complicate matters for you. I had completely forgotten, in my enthusiasm over the young woman's remarkable work, that she was a subject for your own especial study."

"On the contrary, professor, your entrance was fortuitous; it lent verisimilitude to the little farce I have been playing, with your valuable assistance. But I want to ask you a question upon which much depends. For whom did you mistake Miss Shaw when you first saw her?"

Professor Carmody pondered for a space.

"I do not know," he responded at length thoughtfully. "I cannot recall her name, but I was forcibly reminded of a young girl whom I met in Cairo some two years ago, who was studying under Professor Mallory. When Miss Shaw turned

her head I realized my mistake at once, for the girl I speak of had no blemish upon her face. It is rather odd, as the translation bears unmistakable earmarks of Professor Mallory's tutelage, but the association of ideas is undoubtedly responsible for my misapprehension."

"Undoubtedly," echoed Ross. "Nevertheless, if you can recall the name of the young woman in Cairo, by any chance, I shall be grateful."

It was Professor Carmody's turn to halt his visitor at the door.

"This Miss Shaw to whom you just presented me—I trust that—er—she is not under your professional interest as a suspect? A young person of such a high order of intelligence, of intellectuality—"

"By no means, professor. She is merely an unimportant witness in a civil case; rather curious, but with no criminal features. I'll look in on you to-morrow. Try to remember the other girl's name for me; the one in Cairo."

Twenty minutes later, when the young detective was ushered into the presence of Mme. Dumois, even that astute lady could read nothing in his grave noncommittal face.

"You have found her?" The aged voice quivered with the tension of her control, but there was no hint of a tenderer emotion. "The young person you suspected, is she the original of the photograph I showed you?"

Ross shook his head.

"I have been unable to determine." His voice was very low. "She has succeeded in eluding me, Mme. Dumois. I am sorry to be obliged to confess it, but I was too confident. Either I have underestimated her intelligence and inadvertently put her on the defensive, or circumstances have combined to effect her disappearance a second time. She has slipped from my grasp."

The old lady uttered an exclamation of bitter disappointment and anger.

"Why did you not take me to her at once?" she demanded. "A fig for your conscientious scruples, sir! Had she not proved to be the young woman I am looking for, what harm could it have done?"

"None, save precipitate the notoriety

you wish to avoid, Mme. Dumois." He leaned toward her with a ring of passionate earnestness in his tones. "Why will you not be frank with me? What is your interest in this girl? What do you mean to do with her when you have found her?"

"I repeat, that is solely my affair." She fixed him with a shrewd glance. "I might answer your question by another, young man. What interest have you in my motive for instituting this search? You have found some one whom you believe to be the one I wish to see, yet you claim to be unable to produce her. What has my object to do with your chances of locating her once more?"

His interrogator's keen directness took the young detective by surprise, but he countered swiftly.

"Everything, my dear *madame*! If I were assured that her disappearance was a purely voluntary one, resulting from inclination alone, rather than any sinister or criminal cause, I could prosecute my search along far different lines than those I am compelled to adopt, as long as I am working in the dark."

"You have not entirely lost track of your suspect, then?" The old lady leaned forward in her chair. "You will be able to find her again?"

"I firmly believe that I shall, but it may require some little time," he responded cautiously.

Mme. Dumois straightened herself with an air of conscious triumph.

"In that case, Mr. Ross, our original compact holds, unless you voluntarily relinquish it. Find her with the information I have already given you, or drop the case. That is positively my last word in the matter. I decline to take you or any one into my confidence. What I have to say to that young woman shall be said to her alone, and what disposition I shall make of her will be strictly according to her deserts. If I did not believe you to be above suspicion, upon my soul, I should accuse you of knowing more than you will admit and actually trying to shield her!"

"My dear lady!" He raised protesting hands. "I shall not refer you to my chief, or call upon my record to witness my utter

single-mindedness in this, as in every other case I have handled. It is one of the generally accepted prejudices against those engaged in my profession that we are devoid of any finer feeling and insensible to injustice; but I had believed myself immune from such a suspicion, especially in the eyes of a person of your rare discernment."

"I haven't accused you of bribery, young man!" There was a softer, almost contrite note in her dry tones. "But a baby stare has forced many a hasty conclusion. However, we won't quarrel about it. I can assure you of one thing; in placing that young woman in my hands you'll be saving her from far worse ones. Whether she has dabbled in crime or not, the quicker she is located the better for her."

"I shall do my best," Ross said earnestly. "Be assured that I have no interest in this but to serve you. My questions may have seemed impertinent, but they were not prompted by idle curiosity, you know. I shall not intrude again until I have something definite to report."

He bowed over her hand and her withered fingers tightened about his in a cordial clasp.

"I hope it will be soon, Mr. Ross," she added in impulsive candor. "Call whenever you wish and I shall be at home. I won't promise you any further information, but I am a lonely old woman, and I find our little tilts highly diverting. If you have not succeeded in my quest you have at least brought me a new interest in life, and I positively look forward to your visits."

"Thank you." He smiled boyishly. "I will avail myself of your invitation gladly, Mme. Dumois, but remember, I mean to succeed, even if I must work blindfold."

The smile did not linger as he made his way down the path to the drive. The old lady's shrewd instinct had divined his procrastination and unerringly probed its cause, and his chief, too, would be clamoring for a report. Why should he hesitate? The girl was within reach of his hand and his duty was clear. Scar or no scar, he could not blind himself to the conviction that in Betty Shaw his search was ended.

What was it that, stronger than his will, deeper rooted than his loyalty, still held him back from the step which sooner or later would be inevitable?

As the toils closed tighter about the girl and the clouds which encompassed her grew darker and more sinister, her face shone clearer before his mental vision, and her steady eyes seemed to meet his in sorrowful questioning.

He was a detective, but he was also a man; must he, in wilful ignorance of the consequences, deliver her to the tender mercies of Mme. Dumois? She had trusted him, she had replied in simple faith to the decoy advertisement and placed herself in his hands. Mme. Dumois had also given him her confidence, relying upon his professional honor. Which would be the greater betrayal?

Detective McCormick was in the best of humor, and shook hands heartily with his young operative.

"My boy, that was the finest bit of sheer luck that has come our way in many a long day!" he exclaimed. "Your running into Ide hanging around the gates of that place out on the North Drive has given the whole investigation a new turn, and I shouldn't wonder if the results would be sensational."

"I wouldn't be too sanguine, sir." Ross spoke with curious repression. "It was dusk, as I told you, and I only had a momentary glimpse as I flashed past in a taxi. I may have been mistaken."

"You didn't think so the other day." The chief turned in his swivel chair and stared up at him. "You were sure enough then of the identification, and I think myself that you were right. I've had the place covered ever since, and there's something queer doing there, as sure as shooting!"

"Doesn't seem likely." Ross shook his head. "People of the social standing of those who live on the North Drive couldn't be mixed up in any game of Ide's. What did you mean 'queer,' sir? Who's on the job?"

"Clark. The house is owned by a woman named Atterbury; lived there for years, and seems to rate A1 in the neigh-

borhood, but she's laying mighty low—too low for a person who is on the level. She's comparatively young, and a good-looker, but she lives like a hermit, and there's a young girl in the household, a girl with a scar on her face, who will bear watching."

"I think it's a mistake, sir; it must be." Ross spoke with all the assurance he could command. "There's nothing wrong with the Atterbury woman, and as for the girl—"

"As for her, what?" demanded his chief, as he paused. "What do you know about them?"

"Nothing, except in a general way," he hedged lamely. "But if she's the Mrs. Atterbury I imagine, Clark is barking up the wrong tree, and he'll only make a fool of himself if you let him push this matter. Ide—if it was really Ide whom I saw—may have been passing by. That is a blind trail, chief."

"Look here, Ross, what's got into you?" McCormick blustered. "You were as keen on the scent as Clark is now, and all of a sudden you back down. The fellow was Ide, all right; I've never known you to make a mistake yet in spotting a man, and I tell you this Atterbury woman, whoever she is, has an ace in the hole, somewhere. What's the dope?"

"Simply that she is too well known, too prominent. You couldn't touch her, sir. It's out of the question."

"Is it?" McCormick swore a vigorous oath. "Nobody ever flew so high yet that I couldn't bring 'em down when I had the goods on them. And I'll get it, Ross, don't make any mistake about that! This is the first time you've laid down on anything; but Clark will stick like a burr, and even if Ide is out of it, there's some other little game being pulled off up there, you mark my words. We'll get to the bottom of it before I call Clark off it. But what's the good word in your own case?"

"Nothing doing." Ross raised his eyes with an effort to those of his chief. "I've been stalling Mme. Dumois and trying to kid her into giving me enough data to work on, but you know how it was with you. She is fighting so shy of possible notoriety

that she won't loosen, but I haven't given up hope. I found one clue that looked promising, but I was on the wrong track. It wasn't the right girl."

"Well, keep after the old lady." McCormick resumed the cigar butt he had relinquished at the other's appearance. "You can get around her in time if any one can. Let me know when something turns up."

"Very well, sir." Ross accepted the hint and departed, but long after the door had closed behind him, McCormick sat gazing reflectively before him with a startled, half-incredulous query in his eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO CASES OF SUDDEN ILLNESS.

BETTY attacked the new translation that evening with undiminished enthusiasm, but her mind wandered, and when midnight came a few meager lines proved to be the result of her labors. She paused to read them over before putting them away, and the quaint phraseology fell strangely from her lips upon the stillness of the room:

"To the Stele of Abu I have come in peace to sepulcher this of eternity which I have made in the horizon western of the nome of Abydos—"

Her voice halted and trembled into silence, and she stood listening with every nerve strained. A dull jarring crash had sounded from below accompanied by the muffled but harsh tones of a man's voice raised in anger or expostulation.

Hastily disposing of her work she extinguished the light, and groping her way to the door, opened it. The voice had sunk to an indistinguishable rumble, and mingled with it was a murmur in a higher, clearer tone which she had no difficulty in recognizing as that of Mrs. Atterbury.

The girl hesitated, then crept to the head of the stairs. The house was in darkness save for a narrow shaft of light which glowed from the open door of the music-room. Clinging to the balusters, and keeping well in shadow, Betty made her way down the staircase, and from behind the newel post she peered into the room.

Jack Wolverter was crouched half over the table, both fists full of crumpled papers, and his dark face, half defiant, half cringing, leered up at his hostess who stood before him drawn up to her full height in imperious disdain.

"You're crazy!" he ejaculated. "What's the good of playing a waiting game? Come out in the open and make one big bluff, that's my idea."

"You'll find it decidedly dangerous, my man, to execute your ideas without my sanction." Mrs. Atterbury's quiet tones dominated his blustering whine. "Remember, I am master, and I will not brook any rebellion against my authority. I might remind you that the last time you took matters into your own hands the result was unfortunate."

"Ah-h!" The sound which issued from his lips was between a snarl and a groan, and Betty saw his whole body quiver as he cowered back. Mrs. Atterbury advanced a step and her cameolike face suddenly hardened.

"We're all in this for life or death. If one succeeds, all succeed; if one fails, he fails alone. That was my rule, but once I broke it for you. Hereafter you fare with the rest. You have your uses, I admit, but no one is indispensable to me. You know what happened to the Comet; remember her luck when you are tempted to play a lone hand, my friend."

Betty waited to hear no more, but turned and fled silently up the stair, her heart beating tumultuously. The level, unemotional voice of Mrs. Atterbury had not raised in pitch or increased in volume, yet there had been something far more sinister in its measured utterance than any display of ungoverned wrath could have evidenced.

The girl sank trembling upon her couch, and for the first time a vision came to her of her own possible fate should the extent of her knowledge be even suspected by the ruthless woman down-stairs. She had learned from the cipher letter of the retribution which had overtaken the Comet, and once again the stark face of Breckinridge rose before her, his sightless eyes fixed on hers in mute warning.

She covered her face with her hands,

striving to shut out the dread picture imagination conjured for her. She, like the Comet, was playing a lone hand, but the stakes were worth the hazard! At that thought her momentary weakness dropped from her like a cloak and she straightened, her eyes aflame with resolution. She would win, she must!

Disrobing in the dark, she lay for long listening intently, but no sound reached her from below, and the strained effort brought its own reaction of fatigue. She slept at last, to awaken only when the sunlight of broad day streamed through the uncurtained window and flooded her face.

There was no hint of the previous night's quarrel in the genial camaraderie of Mrs. Atterbury's attitude toward Wolvert, but Betty fancied that Mme. Cimmino regarded them both with ill-concealed anxiety, and the girl was glad to escape to the seclusion of the library.

The morning's correspondence awaited her, and she opened the first letter in listless abstraction, her thoughts still centered on the implacable words she had overheard. One glance at the sheet of newspaper in her hand, however, and everything else was banished from her mind.

MY DEAR MARCIA:

Professor Blythe has caught pneumonia in Chicago. Doctors' consultation held over him on Monday. Too old for recovery, Hamilton says is verdict. Much grieved, but still hope. McCormick has been getting orders which evidence strong market. New machinery no trouble to operate. Marked Mary's improved letters; she has seized her opportunity. Hear from out West that John Cote won appeal. Sanatorium being planned for consumptives here. Good air, but nothing can be doing if mayor refuses permit. Please communicate in care Trust Company. Give nobody business confidence but me. They lie who say low prices ruin business. It is dead if the end of the superfluous stock is not sold out regardless of cost.

With kindest regards,

Yours,
SHIRLEY.

With a curious set smile Betty read and reread the missive, then laid it aside, and sat for some minutes staring out of the window. The hidden message was pregnant with meaning and a shade of anxiety crossed her face. The man whom she had seen loitering under the lamp-post just out-

side the gates a few days before loomed up as a possibility more to be dreaded than any present contingency within the house, and she felt that she was being irresistibly carried forward in a chain of events forged by circumstance which she could not break if she would.

When Mrs. Atterbury came to her, Betty watched surreptitiously for her reception of the cipher letter and saw that after a quick glance her employer thrust it without a perusal into her belt. The girl marveled anew at her stoicism; she must at least have gleaned the purport of the first sentence, yet her eyes were as clear and her voice as steady as though it had been the most casual of communications.

Her dictation was interrupted by the abrupt entrance of Mme. Cimmino.

"Look!" the latter exclaimed with an excited gesture toward the window. "It is Louise Dana, but in what haste! Without a hat, too, in this most detestable of climates! Is it that something has happened? An accident?"

She spoke lightly, but her eyes smoldered as they met Mrs. Atterbury's, and the rouge stood out in patches of vivid scarlet against the sudden pallor which blanched her cheeks.

Mrs. Dana was running swiftly up the path from the gate, her meretriciously golden head bare and gleaming in the sunlight. A cloak had been flung carelessly about her figure, but as she sped past the window, Betty noted that her feet were incased in the thinnest of boudoir slippers.

With a murmured ejaculation Mrs. Atterbury hurried from the room, followed by Mme. Cimmino, and the girl was left to her own thoughts. A bell pealed wildly through the house and its echo had not died away when there came the slam of the front door and a piercing cry which reached even to the secluded library, although Betty could only distinguish a word or two.

"Mortie—caught—help—"

"Good God!" It was unmistakably Wolvert's voice, but shaken with the same craven fear which had actuated it on the day of Betty's arrival. "What do you mean by coming here? Do you want to give us all—"

"Silence!" Mrs. Atterbury dominated him, and after a confused murmur from which not a separate word could be gleaned another door closed and the hysterical sobs of Louise Dana were hushed.

What had happened to bring that woman in terror to the house? For it was mortal terror which had distorted her face as she passed the window and had rung in her desperate cry. She had come for help, but what help could she find there? Betty remembered her single meeting with the florid middle-aged man whose eyes were lined with weariness and dissipation. What had he "caught," or was it that he himself had been caught in some difficulty?

For half an hour Betty restlessly paced the library, fearing to venture forth lest she be suspected of eavesdropping yet longing to escape to her own room. The hum of a motor drew her to the window, and she reached it in time to see the familiar bizarre stripes of Mrs. Atterbury's own car whirl past and down the drive, with a fleeting glimpse of a golden head within it. Whatever her trouble, the woman had not remained to add its shadow to those already clustering about the household.

It was with somewhat of a shock that Betty turned to find her employer standing on the threshold.

"Yes, she has gone." Mrs. Atterbury nodded, following the girl's glance. "Such a ridiculously nervous, excitable, young woman! Just fancy, my dear! Mr. Dana—you met him at my last dinner, if you remember—has been ailing for some days, and this morning the physician was called and found that he was suffering an acute attack of diphtheria. It is very sad, of course, although I do not doubt that he will pull through, but that silly wife of his rushed out of the house just as she was with only a cloak over her negligee, jumped into a taxi and came straight to me. Unfortunately, the car broke down a short distance beyond our gates, and what the neighbors will think of her running about bareheaded I cannot imagine!"

"I am sorry about Mr. Dana," Betty remarked in a lowered tone. "Diphtheria is very dangerous, isn't it?"

"Not since medicine has become the

science that it is to-day," responded the other indifferently. "Mr. Wolvert was quite annoyed. Did you hear him? He is an arrant coward about contagion, like most men, and he feared she would give the disease to all of us! It really was stupid of her, but they are strangers here, you know, and I am practically the only friend she has. I arranged by phone for Mr. Dana's reception in a private hospital and she has gone back to him with her nerves steadied. What empty-headed fools most modern women are!"

Her tone was a skilful blend of indignation and amusement, but she bent her eyes upon the girl in a keen, unwavering scrutiny, as if to satisfy herself that the explanation was received in good faith.

Betty smiled back at her steadily.

"People are apt to lose their heads when some one they love is in trouble, don't you think?" she asked.

"Some people, not those with any self-control. I don't believe that you would for instance, my dear. I think that you could be counted upon to act in any emergency which presented itself with quick decision and courage if you were sufficiently interested."

Betty flushed, but she replied without a tremor.

"Perhaps I should. I hope so. We never can tell until the moment comes."

CHAPTER XX.

FACE TO FACE.

LUNCHEON was a constrained meal. Mme. Cimmino maintained a noncommittal silence and her nervous fluttering hands were still, but Wolvert's mood had changed to a mocking frivolity which Betty had learned to recognize as the reaction of his lawless nature from any emotional stress. Divining the girl's aversion, he directed his witticisms at her, and sought in impish perversity to compel her response. Mme. Cimmino listened and watched with somber eyes, and Mrs. Atterbury flashed an ominous warning to him as they rose.

For the better part of the afternoon her employer kept Betty beside her, busied with

the mending of household linen, while from the music-room came strange intermittent bursts of melody, rippling, elusive, hauntingly sweet. Long moments of silence would ensue and then a thunderous crash of chords, as if in very fury the musician sought to smother the softer, tenderer strain.

Betty was fascinated in spite of herself. It was as though the man's inmost soul was revealed, racked with the storm of his passions yet alluring in its reckless gay abandon. A dangerous man to himself as well as to others, she felt, and to her own heart there came again that thrill of fear.

When she descended the stairs at dusk, she found Wolvert standing before the great hearth in the hall, staring moodily into the flames. She would have passed him with a mere nod, but he stepped forward impulsively.

"Where have you been hiding yourself since lunch? I looked for you in every corner, but you had vanished."

"For me?" Betty paused in unguarded surprise.

"For you, *mademoiselle!*" he mimicked her slyly. "Why will you not be kind and talk to me? I know that you disapprove of me most heartily, but you have promised to be friendly and I am bored with my own exclusive society. Come and sit here and tell me what goes on behind those grave, wise, young eyes of yours."

He pushed a chair forward coaxingly, but she shook her head.

"I—I have a message for Welch—" she began.

"A plague take Welch!" Wolvert interrupted. "In all this great house, where no one ever does anything and nothing ever happens, must you alone be always busy, you who alone are worth talking to? You could tell me much, if you would."

There was a note of studied intent in his tone which held her as much as the choice of phrase piqued her curiosity.

"What do you mean, Mr. Wolvert? What could I tell you?"

He shrugged, laughing lightly.

"Why you are always so still, for one thing, like a little mouse. Your silence intrigues me. Why your glance is always

so distraught, as if you were listening to a far-off voice." He knelt upon the chair, his arms folded across its back, and brought his dark face close to hers. "Perhaps you will tell me also why your smile is so sad and so bitter when you think that you are unobserved. What has life taught you, Little Mouse?"

"To keep my own counsel, Mr. Wolvert." Betty retreated a step or two, but her eyes met his gravely. "To walk warily, and to do my appointed work."

"That is a wise creed." He seemed to muse aloud. "But is this your appointed work? To write at another's dictation, to fetch and carry, to serve and wait, and to be finally dismissed! You are so demure, so docile, so perfectly in the picture, that I sometimes wonder if you are not playing a part."

He paused and she waited breathlessly, seeking to read in his sardonic smile how much of serious purpose lay behind the facetious drawl.

"Your work is still new to you, but are you content?" He rose and strode around the chair to face her. His manner had changed and the words fell in a rapid, insistent undertone from his lips. "Will you be satisfied always to stay in the background, to occupy the extra chair, to be commanded when you might command? You have too much intelligence to be without ambition, too much common sense to work for a mere pittance when you might share, too much personality to remain a nonentity. You are quick-witted and discreet, you would go far if you were shown the way, and I—"

"Jack!" Mme. Cimmino's querulous voice sounded from the stairs, and Betty shrank guiltily. Wolvert straightened and uttered an oath beneath his breath, but the next instant the little mocking smile was curling about his lips.

"Ah, Speranza! Now that I have ceased torturing the piano, you come forth from your refuge! I have been trying to beguile Miss Shaw from her duty and succeeded only in boring her. Come down and tell me how you liked my concerto; you must have heard it, for I thundered it to the gods."

"Miss Shaw does not look bored." Mme. Cimmino flashed a look of unconcealed hostility at the girl, her usually dull eyes snapping fire. "Marcia has sent me for you. She is in her private sitting-room."

"At your service, *madame*." He shrugged, glanced at Betty from beneath lowered lids, and bounded lightly up the stairs. Midway he passed the woman and she caught his arm, murmuring something in a staccato patter of Italian. He shook himself free, and, laughing, vanished around the gallery overhead.

"Will you be satisfied always to be commanded when you might command?" His words still rang in Betty's ears and his dark face, sinister and insurgent, rose before her mental vision. Had he not spoken as much to himself as to her? He, too, appeared to be at Mrs. Atterbury's command, and the girl recalled his half-cringing defiance in that secret quarrel of the previous evening. Was he contemplating revolt?

All at once she became aware that Mme. Cimmino had descended and stood before her, staring with insolent hauteur into her face.

"I must find Welch; I have a message for him." She stammered and was turning away when the other woman detained her with a gesture.

"Surely a further delay will make but little difference, Miss Shaw." Her tones were silky. "There is something I wish to say to you, and you would do well to listen to me. You are clever even for an American young girl, but you rely too much upon your ability to take care of yourself. For your own good I speak; do not try to play with Jack Wolvert."

"I don't understand you, *madame*," Betty said coldly. "What have I to do with any guest of Mrs. Atterbury?"

"What, indeed?" The woman came close and thrust her sallow pointed chin forward. "Do you think I have no eyes, that I have not seen your sly, crude efforts to engage his attention? *Mille tonnerres!* You are but a conceited, overconfident child! Your very gaucherie may amuse him for the moment, but you could not hold him a day. Do I not know him? Have

I not studied his every mood these many years? Could you think in the insolence of your youth to take him from me?"

"You are mistaken, *madame*." The girl spoke in quiet control, but she met the snakelike glitter in the other's eyes with an answering gleam. "I have no interest whatever in Mr. Wolvert, and his inclinations and prejudices are alike of no moment to me. In any case I am accountable to my employer alone for my conduct and I have received no complaint from Mrs. Atterbury. Let me pass, please."

"Then I warn you!" Mme. Cimmino turned livid. "You are treading on dangerous ground, more dangerous than you know. Keep your silly, schoolgirl wiles for others, but leave Jack Wolvert to me or I will make you wish that the earth has opened and engulfed you before you crossed my path!"

Betty smiled.

"Your threats do not interest me, Mme. Cimmino. I shall accept censure only from Mrs. Atterbury, and I beg that you will go to her. I really cannot listen any longer to these unfounded accusations."

She turned and left the other inarticulate with rage. Her own heart was filled with a dull ache of resentment, not against the hysterical virago and her absurd charge, but against the perverse fate which, through no act or fault of hers, seemed rearing difficulty after difficulty in the way of her purpose. She did not underestimate the intelligence of Wolvert or the danger of arousing his suspicions, while she realized that the jealous animosity of Mme. Cimmino might at any moment precipitate a crisis. She must walk warily, indeed.

Her message delivered to Welch, she ascended the back stairs to avoid a second encounter with the woman who had become her enemy, and was rounding the gallery shadowed in the gathering dusk, when a blotch of white lying against the base-board caught her eye.

It was a folded paper, crumpled in the center, and even before she opened it, a premonition warned her of its contents. The cipher letter! The significant words leaped out at her anew from the irrelevancies with which they were cloaked, and on a swift

impulse, she thrust the letter into her breast.

Late that night, when all was still, Betty crept from her room and down the stairs like an unquiet wraith intent upon the secret motive which actuated her, yet on her guard for the slightest warning of discovery.

The darting ray from her electric torch played before her, dancing in a diminutive circle of light upon the wall and piercing the almost opaque darkness like a flash of forked lightning. The midnight silence was oppressive in its intensity and for the first time there seemed to be a brooding menace in the soundless void.

The girl's nerves were tingling and the torch wavered fitfully in her hand. A hallucination, vague but terrible, took possession of her that something unnameable lurked in the shadows, watching, crouched to spring. In vain she summoned her resolute will to her aid, lashing herself with scorn for her weakness. A swift unreasoning fear clutched her by the throat and her trembling limbs all but refused her support.

Doggedly she forced herself to go on, but the distance from stair-foot to library door seemed interminable, and when she had traversed it Betty paused, an inexplicable reluctance staying her hand upon the knob.

At length she set her teeth and with an impatient jerk opened the door. Her torch light circled about the familiar room, the desk, with its orderly array of papers, the center table, the bookcases—

Her breath caught in a strangling gasp. One bookcase was swinging loosely on its secret hinge and the safe in the aperture behind was open, a handful of documents scattered upon the floor.

Slowly her light traveled along the wall, creeping ever nearer and nearer to the hearth. The brass andirons glittered dazzling from the darkness and the outline of a massive chair leaped into prominence. Something lay relaxed upon its arm, and the wavering light stopped.

It was a black coat-sleeve, motionless but seemingly vibrant with life, and from it protruded a pallid hand shapely and slender, its tapering fingers loosely extended.

There was a roaring as of many waters

in Betty's ears and her heart seemed to have ceased to beat, but mechanically she trained the light upward. Jack Wolvert's face, diabolic in triumph, leered back at her, and his mocking eyes stared straight into her own.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE LIBRARY.

FOR a long moment Betty stood transfixed with the electric torch rigid in her hand and her eyes held by the insolent challenging ones so near hers. Then with an almost physical effort she wrenched her gaze away just as his cynical voice, drawling no longer but keen with malign exultation, cut the silence like a knife thrust.

"So, Little Mouse! You venture from your hiding-place at night when all are sleeping, to nibble at forbidden dainties, eh?"

He sprang from his chair with the agility of a cat and seized her wrist in a viselike grip which forced her tortured fingers to relax their hold and the torch clattered to the hearth. His hot breath laden with the fumes of wine played upon her neck, and she felt rather than realized the menace in his low, breathed words.

"I thought there was a traitor in camp! Who sent you here to spy upon us, girl? In whose pay are you? 'Quick, or I'll—"

"I don't know what you mean!" Betty whimpered into the darkness. "Let me go, you are hurting me, Mr. Wolvert! I—I could not sleep, I came down for a book I left unfinished and you frightened me!"

"That doesn't go; it's too thin!" he growled harshly. "Young ladies don't prowl about at night with electric torches for any innocent purpose. What's the lay?"

"I don't understand!" Betty reeled against him, then shrank away. "I—I feel faint—"

His grip insensibly relaxed, and the girl, seizing her opportunity, tore herself from his grasp and vanished into the black void of the hall. She could hear the crash of the massive chair behind her as he overturned it in his stumbling pursuit and a rumble of oaths followed her up the stairs. Miracu-

lously she cleared every obstacle and her alert brain outpaced her flying feet. One desperate move was left her to turn certain exposure into possible victory. Its failure could not increase the peril of her present position and success would serve to entrench her more firmly in the confidence of the woman who would be her judge.

She groped her way noiselessly to her own door, found the switch in the wall and flooded the room with light. A pink boudoir candle stood upon her dressing-table and seizing it she thrust it into the live coals in the grate until it was partly consumed. Then shielding its flickering flame she went straight to her employer's door and knocked boldly.

A murmur responded, a light flared up within, and Mrs. Atterbury stood on the threshold. In her white robe with her long, dusky hair in two heavy plaits upon her shoulders and her waxen, expressionless face she might have been an effigy taken from some ancient place of worship; all but her eyes, which gleamed like banked fires, suddenly revealed.

"What is it?" she asked. "You are not well, my dear?"

"Oh, it isn't that. I am quite well, but I thought you would wish to know that your safe is open down-stairs," Betty whispered.

"My safe!" Mrs. Atterbury fell back a step and her pale face grayed.

"Yes, the one in the library. I suppose it is all right, as Mr. Wolvert is there, but I felt that I could not sleep without telling you."

"And what were you doing in the library at this hour?" The woman's scrutiny fairly burned into Betty's brain, but her wide ingenuous eyes did not flinch nor her voice falter.

"I was restless and wakeful and I remembered a book I had left there, so I lighted my tandle and went down. Everything was dark, but when I opened the library door I saw a man with an electric torch in his hand. He sprang forward and seized me and I thought it must be a burglar, until he spoke and I recognized Mr. Wolvert's voice. The safe was open and papers all scattered about, and somehow his man-

ner frightened me. I—I thought I had better come straight to you."

"An electric torch?" Mrs. Atterbury repeated and paused, her lips pursed thoughtfully. Betty waited in an agony of suspense. Would the slender thread of her fabrication bear the weight of this woman's keen analysis or would it snap beneath her swift inexorable judgment? Freedom, perhaps life itself, hung upon the issue.

"You did the proper thing, my dear, and I am very glad that I can rely on you to let me know at once if anything seems wrong in the household." Mrs. Atterbury's smile announced the verdict. "But in this instance, everything is quite all right. Mr. Wolvert was going over some private accounts for me at my request, and doubtless you startled him by your sudden appearance as much as his presence surprised you."

"I am sorry I disturbed you—" Betty began in well simulated contrition, but the other stopped her with a gesture.

"You did not, but in any case it would have been your duty, my dear. However I do not approve of your going about the house so late at night, for Welch has an inordinate apprehension of burglars and is likely to blaze away promiscuously with his revolver if he hears any untoward sound. Be careful in future. And now good night, Betty, and thank you."

The reaction from the strait through which she had passed was so great that the girl all but collapsed when her own door had closed once more behind her. She had forestalled Wolvert's betrayal, but would her version of the evening's encounter prevail against his narration, bearing as it must the stamp of truth?

Then another contingency presented itself to her mind. What if Wolvert's visit to the library had been, like her own, a surreptitious one? She remembered his significant phrase of the afternoon: "You have too much common sense to work for a mere pittance when you might share." She had fancied then that he was but voicing his own inmost thought, the aftermath of his open rebellion which Mrs. Atterbury had so imperiously quelled on the previous night. Had he turned traitor to the mys-

terious compact that bound him and all of their circle in a sinister secret alliance? Had she by this betrayal made of him an implacable enemy? Even if she had succeeded in lulling her employer's possible suspicion, her presence in the library had disclosed her true position in the household to Wolvert and she realized that a powerful weapon lay within his reach if it were to be war to the knife between them.

To her amazement, the matter was not again referred to in the days that immediately ensued and if Wolvert had gone to Mrs. Atterbury with his tale, or learned of the girl's disclosure, he gave no sign. While he did not openly avoid her he made no effort to arrange a tête-à-tête, only his gaze burning with a strange intensity of questioning, filled her with troubled unrest.

Mme. Cimmino treated the girl with frigid indifference, but unconsciously played into her hands by constant demands upon Wolvert's time and attention.

Mrs. Atterbury's manner did not betray an iota of change and the days followed one another in an unbroken routine until the following Sunday, when there occurred an event which plunged Betty deeper than ever into the toils of difficulty and danger.

The breakfast gong, sounding a full hour earlier than usual aroused the girl from slumber and she descended to find Mrs. Atterbury already at the table, the coffee urn bubbling at her elbow.

"My dear, I am going to send you to church this morning," she began, nodding as Betty lifted inquiring eyes to hers. "It is another letter which I wish you to obtain from one of our outstanding members, and he has arranged to meet you there. You may object to making use of a house of worship for a mundane transaction, even though the cause be a worthy one, but the better the day, the better the deed, you know."

"I have no scruples." Betty smiled slightly. "It will be interesting to see what the churches here are like; I have not attended service since coming East."

"St. Jude's is one of the most prominent in the city. The minister is noted and the congregation representative of the best society. I am not a churchgoer myself, as

you have seen, but laziness, not prejudice, is responsible for my dereliction. You won't be bored, I promise you, and the incidental errand will not be complicated by any such annoying misunderstanding as on the last occasion.

"You will enter by the door leading to the center aisle and tell the usher that you wish to be placed in the fourth pew from the back of the church on the right as you face the altar. Be careful of this as the location is of the utmost importance. Seat yourself at the end of the pew next the aisle and pay no attention to any one. When an envelope is presented to you, no matter in what manner or from what quarter, accept it without a word and at the conclusion of the service bring it home to me."

"I shall remember, the fourth pew from the back," Betty repeated. "The service commences at eleven, does it not?"

"Yes. The car will be here for you at a quarter before the hour, but it will be necessary for you to return without it. However, I will direct you implicitly and you will be in no danger of losing your way a second time. Come to me when you are ready."

Betty's pulse quickened in spite of her inward reluctance to perform the task before her. That it had been given her, proved to her own satisfaction that her daring move on the night of her discovery had really achieved the result she had hoped for and that she was more firmly established than ever in her employer's confidence.

Attired in the gray suit and silvery furs she presented herself for Mrs. Atterbury's final instructions, and the latter regarded with approval her dainty appearance and unveiled face.

"You have determined like a sensible girl to overcome that absurd self-consciousness about your birthmark? That is well." She placed an ivory bound prayer-book in the girl's hands. "This adds the finishing touch to your costume, my dear. You look quite like a modern Puritan. Now as to the directions for finding your way home. St. Jude's is on the corner of Carlton Avenue and Brinsley Square. Walk five blocks

north and two east and you will come to the terminus of the Highmount trolley line. Take a green car and ride to Wellesley Place. There you can connect with a red bus which will drop you three blocks from the corner here, at the same spot you alighted when returning from Mme. Cimmino's apartment. Do you think you will be able to remember?"

"I think so," Betty replied slowly. "About the letter, Mrs. Atterbury; it makes no difference who offers it to me in this instance, I am to accept it without question?"

"Certainly. There will be no difficulty about that. There is the car, now. Remember Betty, the fourth pew."

The girl nodded reassuringly and started upon her way.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FOURTH PEW.

TO Betty's relief, there had been no sign of either of the house guests that morning and it was with freer breath that she found herself departing even for an hour from their vicinity. The gloom and apprehension which enveloped her and insensibly sapped her nerves in the environment of mystery and repression within the house lifted as soon as she was beyond the gates, although a little frown gathered upon her brow.

Beneath the lamp-post stood the same idly lounging figure she had seen on the day of her unexpected encounter with Herbert Ross, and he peered keenly into the limousine as it whirled by, making no attempt to cloak his eager interest. Whatever the motive of his protracted vigil his presence alone indicated that it had not yet borne result, yet it served as a goad to her own secret intent.

A short, shrill whistle sounded upon the air as the car rounded the corner, but Betty was only subconsciously aware of it so preoccupied was she with her own thoughts. Since the night of her encounter with Wolvert in the library and Mrs. Atterbury's adroitly conveyed command that she indulge in no future nocturnal wan-

derings she had not ventured to leave her room in the small hours, but now the realization came to her that if she were not to be forestalled she must risk all.

The car took its place in the decorous line and Betty alighted before the doors of the imposing edifice mingling with the brilliant stream which eddied about the vestibule. The measured chant of the processional welled forth when the inner door was opened and the girl waited until the others had preceded her to their places before venturing into the nave.

A tall, tow-haired usher, very young and very self-important bowed stiffly and turned to conduct her down the aisle when she touched his arm and whispered:

"The fourth pew on the right, please, if it is vacant. I have a particular reason for wishing to occupy that seat."

Betty fancied that his expression changed; it was patent, at any rate, that he regarded her curiously, although he responded with ready courtesy:

"Certainly, madam. The rear pews are all reserved for strangers."

She slipped into the pew designated and knelt for a moment in silent prayer before taking her seat. Her mind was filled with unrest but the quiet and solemn peace which pervaded the atmosphere was like balm upon her troubled spirit and insensibly she relaxed beneath its gentle influence.

The vaulted arches high above, shadowy and vague in the half-light, rang with the clear swelling notes of the white-robed choir which she could glimpse above the sea of heads before her and when their echo had died away, the sonorous well-rounded tones from the pulpit fell with soothing monotony upon her ear, lulling her to a temporary forgetfulness of her errand.

Not for long, however. A late comer, a woman, was ushered into the pew beside her and Betty's drugged senses awoke to instant alertness. She had been given no hint as to what manner of person would keep the strange appointment with her and no one could so unobtrusively pass an envelope to her as an occupant of the same pew.

She darted a furtive glance at her unknown companion, but could form no conclusion. The woman was of middle age, neatly but plainly dressed in contrast with the brilliant assemblage about her, and her comely, serene face bore no indication of one engaged upon a secret mission.

The seat behind Betty was occupied by a governess and three restive children; that before her contained two elderly ladies, an anemic youth, and a bent old man, his white head nodding above a gold-topped cane. Surely none of these could have entered the church with an ulterior motive.

Betty had been placed so that the left side of her face was turned to the aisle and the birthmark prominently visible. She realized that this must have been planned to proclaim her identity, but the woman seated beside her politely ignored her existence and as the lengthy sermon drew to a close, the girl was forced to conclude that the unknown associate in the transaction would approach her on the way out.

A hymn, a prayer, and then from the pulpit the familiar: "Let your light so shine before men—" proclaimed the collection. The opening notes of the offertory sounded from the choir and Betty abstracted some money from her purse and idly watched the approach of the smug-faced rotund little man who minced down the aisle, pausing at each pew to extend apologetically his felt-lined silver salver.

She heard the rustle of bank-notes and clink of coins as he drew nearer and when he had reached the pew immediately in front of her Betty saw that the salver was heaped high with offerings.

The bearer paused over long and she glanced up to find that his small pouched eyes were fixed as though fascinated upon her face. A swift forewarning of the truth darted across her mind even before she observed that with surprising dexterity he had whipped from the pocket of his austere frock coat a small, square, white envelope which he laid conspicuously upon the pile of currency.

Two short strides brought him to her side and he thrust the salver nervously before her. She had no need to glance

again into his face to confirm her thought for upon the envelope had been scrawled an odd, fantastic mark, meaningless to others but of unmistakable significance to her. It was the outline of an irregular formless blotch with five curving tentacles reaching out from it; a crudely sketched representation of the scar upon her cheek!

With a hot flush mounting to her brow, Betty dropped her offering upon the salver and deftly palmed the envelope, not daring to raise her eyes. The woman beside her was intently fumbling in her purse and the swift furtive movement of the girl had been unobserved.

The bearer of the salver emitted a gasping breath that was almost a snort, and as the stranger's bank-note was added to the rest he bowed and passed on with obvious relief to the next pew.

Wedging the envelope between the pages of her prayer-book, Betty watched as the smug-faced man joined his colleague who had passed down the opposite row and marched beside him with grave dignity back to the altar-rail. The solemnity, the calm spiritual peace had vanished for the girl and the warm incense-laden air stifled her as the recessional died away in the dim recesses of the vestry, and she knelt mechanically for the final prayer.

The slow, crowded egress from the edifice tortured her beyond measure and when at length she stood in the dazzling sunshine on the steps she drew a deep breath of profound relief.

It was a blustery day and the treacherous March wind caught her roughly in its grasp, but she faced it boldly as though welcoming the physical exertion.

Amazement at the daring manner in which the missive had been placed in her hands had momentarily numbed her faculties. Its donor was the last person from whom she would have expected to receive it. His strutting importance, his bland, patronizing air of conscious dignity and social eminence accorded ill with her preconceived idea of the type of person she would meet.

His predecessors passed in quick, mental review before her; the weak-chinned, downy-mustached scion of society in the

opera box, the timorous, fragile, exquisite lady with the orchids, and now this rotund, pragmatistical pillar of the church! What mysterious bond held these three, widely diversified as they were, in a common fellowship with Mrs. Atterbury and her coterie?

So absorbed was she in her reflections that Betty gave only a passing glance at a man who had elbowed his way through the throng at the church steps and in apparent inadvertence followed her as she walked north from Brinsley Square and turned eastward in her footsteps. She was vaguely aware that some one boarded the Highmount car when she did, alighting behind her at Wellesley Place. Ignorant of the city as she had claimed to be, she could not fail in the realization that the directions given her to follow were curiously roundabout ones and had taken her several unnecessary miles out of her way. Why had Mrs. Atterbury chosen this route for her?

Her mind was filled with this new problem and she did not observe her pursuer enter a taxicab as she boarded a red bus. It was only when she noted that the smaller vehicle deliberately stalked the larger, halting when the bus stopped and following it doggedly through the mazes of Sunday traffic, that her interest was aroused, and as one after another of the passengers descended until she was left in

sole possession of the conveyance and still the taxicab clung tenaciously behind, a suspicion came to her that she might be the subject of espionage.

A memory came to her of the circuitous route followed by the limousine in bringing her home from the Café de Luxe. Could the motive have been to elude pursuit? Had the same purpose prevailed in Mrs. Atterbury's mind when she issued these devious directions for her messenger's return?

Betty alighted at her corner and walked swiftly off toward the North Drive without a backward glance, but her acute ear told her that the taxicab had turned and was trailing slowly in her wake.

Deliberately she slackened her pace and the machine stopped; hastening on she heard it start again. The first cross street was but a few yards away, and on a sudden inspiration Betty started to run, turning the corner sharply, and darting into a narrow tradesman's alley between two houses. There she crouched motionless while the taxicab veered around the corner, stopped with a harsh grating of brakes and then chugged uncertainly on and out of sight.

Betty's face was scarlet, and her eyes ablaze, but her heart was turned to lead within her breast, for her pursuer had leaned for an instant from the cab window and she had recognized the face of Herbert Ross.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.



Listening In by Henry Leverage

HE was born within sound of the Bow bells, in Cheapside, London. He left his country for his country's good after wearing the "broad arrow" of Dartmoor for a three-year term of penal servitude. His coming to the States and his sojourn there was a chapter made vivid by adroit wire-tapping and an attempt to dodge the agile police of its principal cities.

The end came to English Joe, as he was called, as it comes to every babe of grace. He had drifted back to New York as a magnet is attracted by a lodestone, or a straw to a whirlpool. His flash companions of the old days passed the word down the line until it reached the listening ears of headquarters. A general drop-

from the war bulletins. English Joe had visions of a certain well-known summer resort on the Hudson as he dashed across the fender of a trolley-car, into the Gold Room Café, out through an alley, and over a fence, and thence to the Port of Missing Men—the army.

An hour later the recruiting sergeant of Great Britain, broad of chest and heavy of fist, was thumping English Joe as a possible recruit for the force under General Haig.

"We can use you," he declared, scratching his head. "We can use you somewhere. Wot's your occupation?"

"Electrician."

"Telephone. field service, wireless,

As Cocky Joe, or plain Cocky, he was whipped into shape to stand the game on the Flanders front. He shrieked at times, but broadened and hardened until the field outfit he was with—a part of the Canadian heavy artillery—came to realize that, if nothing else, Cocky knew electricity as a Tyneside boiler-maker knows steam.

The fall drive for Roulers, north of Ypres, found Cocky stringing field wires along a shell-haunted front. The shots from the British 9.2 had to be spotted from advanced positions. It was his duty to see that some of these positions were in constant communication with the battery commanders three miles to the rear of the first-line trenches.

Cocky's laboratory was a battered dug-out. His companions were a lanky lineman who answered to the name of Slim, and an American telegraph operator called Ham, who had joined the Canadian heavy artillery when the Detroit recruiting officers had refused to pass him for the American draft.

The dugout bore the sinister name: "High-Tension Hut." It was filled with a heterogeneous assortment of electrical instruments, batteries, telegraph keys and sounders, blue vitriol, wire in coils, pliers and clippers, hand-generator sets, and field-kits, cased like small trunks, with straps and handles.

Cocky had forgotten the shepherd-plaid suit and Caspari. His lurid past had been wiped out in the compelling flame of the strife. He had found himself and gloried in his service to England and France. The work to do was in his line. He had been born an electrician, and had twisted it to the wrong use, that was all.

Electricity had become an important factor in the great struggle of locked armies. The search-lights, without which No Man's Land might become an ambush at any moment, required an entire generating set for each mile of front. The field wireless kept the army in touch with the spotting planes. The American telephone exchanges were the very veins of the entire front. Through them the commander-in-chief and far-off Downing Street could talk with every officer and colonel in the British or French army.

These exchanges and their miles of wire did not concern Cocky. He was interested in the smaller field sets that wormed across the shell-pitted surface of No Man's Land to listening posts and spotting positions.

Shell-fire from the German "Busy Berthas" and "77's" had a provoking habit of cutting the lines when they were most needed. Cocky and his two assistants spent their hours making repairs under fire. They free-lanced the front without orders and waited for the time when they would not hear the plunging shell that killed them.

Life had become a sort of prairie-dog existence to Cocky, alias English Joe, when the rumor crept through the wires that a general advance had been ordered to cut off the railroads leading into the U-boat ports along the Belgian coast.

The sap-heads had been driven under the German lines. The Cornish miners had emerged, glad for a change of air and rest somewhere in the sun of France. The heavies on railroad trucks were sending more than their regular compliments to the Fritzes. The rumor had been passed from unshaven lips to unshaven lips that Italy was in danger of a deluge of Teuton troops drawn from Russia and the western front. The air was charged with electric expectancy. Also it was filled with "coal-boxes," "Creeping Jimmies," "flying pigs," and "Jack Johnsons" from the German guns.

"A one-star wonder," or second lieutenant, had brought the final word to Cocky, who was repairing the aluminum armature of a sounder in the dugout. The lieutenant crept through, removed his tin hat, and mopped his brow as he squinted at Cocky, then at the sounder.

"The old man wants you to take a stalk out in No Man's Land to-night, and see if you can tap the German's line that must run from the Labyrinth to the mill of the Four Winds. There's a buried line there, somewhere. They've been able to place ten coal-boxes in our first line in twelve shots—that shows spotting from the mill."

Cocky laid his soldering-iron down upon the charcoal burner.

"What the bleedin' 'ell does old Brass-Top think I am—a mole?"

"Can't you do it?"

"With th' star-shells an' search-lights an' th' moon an' th' rockets, th' bloomin' place's like a ballroom in Mayfair. Old Brass-Top don't expect much with 'im a sittin' in a comfortable château an' eyin' th' bubbles in a wine stem."

"He said you were used to taking chances." The lieutenant's voice contained a menace to Cocky.

"'E said that, did 'e? What did 'e mean?"

"Oh, you know! Since the Sammies been over we've had plenty of American papers."

"Wot's that got to do with this bleedin' fight?"

"Nothing, Cocky. The old man's wise—that's all. There's been talk of American detectives. The Yard's letting you alone—I don't think they care. You're doing your duty by your king and country—that's all we ever asked. There's plenty of apaches in the French outfits."

"You call me a bloomin' throat-slittin' apache?"

"Nothing like that. You've got a past—I've heard. You want to live it down. Well, here's a chance. Find out where the Huns have got their line between the mill and the Labyrinth. Tap it if you can. We're going over the top one of these mornings, and the more we know, the better. What do you say, Cocky?"

Cocky toyed with the handle of the soldering-iron.

"I sye it's nobody's bleedin' business wot I am or wot I've done. I took th' shillin' fair an' square. I'm doin' my bit. Tell old Brass-Top I'll think it over. Them Fritzes keep th' place lit up like Piccadilly. It's a long chance. I'll think it over."

The lieutenant nodded and crawled out of the dugout. Cocky watched him till he vanished and the door closed. He laid the iron back again in the flame. His unshaven face and long nose were still white from the tenseness of the moment. Vague rumors had crystallized into actual suspicion. The king-pin of wire-tappers had not been able to hide his identity in the army of Haig.

"An' me th' last of th' mob," thought

Cocky with a grimace. "Old Charlie in Joliet, Little Micky in Sing Sing, Paper-Collar Pete in 'is grave, an' th' Humble Dutchman in Danemora with twenty solid smackers starin' him in th' face. It's a beastly finish—it is."

Cocky had the saving grace of a sense of humor. He whistled through his loose lips as he picked up the soldering-iron, spat at it, dipped it into the acid, then finished the brass connection that had been broken by a boche bullet.

He laid the iron on a sheet of tin, tossed the sounder to the work-bench, and rolled a cigarette. His pop eyes wandered about the litter of the place. He mentally sized up a set of dry batteries, two field-telephone sets, a long coil of No. 18 insulated wire, and a detector of his own construction in one corner.

This detector was fitted with a tiny volt and ammeter. It had brass plugs like a Wheatstone Bridge. It contained a balanced relay and a phantom circuit so adjusted that another circuit could be detected by an Audion detector, even if the other circuit were five feet under ground.

"I'll need 'em all," thought Cocky. "I'll need 'em an' a papier-mâché horse for *camouflage*. There's plenty of dead artillery horses between th' mill an' the Labyrinth. One more won't be noticed if I can get it there. I'll try to-night if it's misty. Old Brass-Top's got a crust, though."

Slim and Ham came in at sun-down. They had been repairing a shell-cut line that led from the firing trench to a crump-hole in advance of the British main position. Ham's tin hat had been dented by shrapnel. He dragged on a cigarette before he took it off and glanced at it with an "I'll be darned" expression.

Cocky had a mulligan going in another tin hat. This mulligan consisted of the regular ration and part of Slim's home box. The flame that boiled it came from a blowtorch hot enough to melt brass. They sat down in an atmosphere of sulfuric acid, blue vitriol, burnt powder, and trench philosophy.

"I've hordered a bloomin' 'orse." This from Cocky.

"A horse?" said Slim.

"You're blyme well right—a 'orse. 'E's got a flowin' tail, an' a belly, an' a polka-dot 'ide, an' eyes to see through."

"He has?" This from Ham.

"'E's cannon-broke an' bred. 'E won't shy at anythin' short of a Yank with a corn-cob pipe. Old Brass-Top's 'avin' 'im made by a Frenchy what paints out trains wid a brush like a bloomin' comet's tail. 'E's goin' to do 'isself proud—'e is. 'E's puttin' an old master job on a nag what I'm goin' to take wid me on a little gallop hout in Nobody's Land."

Slim and Ham were duly impressed. "When?" they asked in unison.

"This blyme night—if it's misty. Hit's always misty. Old Brass-Top, 'e says, says 'e, 'Cocky Marmyduke Landcaster, you're th' man.' It's a whoppin' big honor, it is. Me, and a Darby winner made hout of cheese-cloth an' laths, is a goin' to do a little sleuthin' all by our lonely. Mind that Fritz battery what was smashed between th' bleedin' Labyrinth an' th' bloomin' Mill o' th' Four Winds, what hain't no mill no more. Th' Fritzes got a line there somewhere—telephone wid both ends alive—an' I'm a goin' to tap it like Bill Sykes tapped th' old miser's till, I am."

"It's a D. S. O. if you can do it," mouthed Slim.

"I don't want nothin' like that. I'm itchin' to get 'unk wid th' Fritzes, that's all. Ain't they done enough to us?"

"And ain't we comin' back at them?" said Slim. "They tell me—Little Sap an' Frankie out in th' crump-hole where they're spottin' shots—that th' Fritz first line is smashed an' th' second a butcher-shop. We ought to go over an' finish it up, Cocky."

"You're bloomin' well right, we ought to. But wid them pill-boxes an' them water-cooled riveters of theirs, wot shoot seven hundred pills a minute, it ain't no perfume job. Like as not, old Brass-Top is a waitin' till th' bunch in th' rest billets change wid th' Fritz outfits in th' firing trenches. 'E's a figurin' on catchin' 'em off their feet, an' smashin' 'em then. 'E's a 'oly 'orror for thinkin' how to save 'is brigade. Ain't we lost enough already?"

"Why did th' old man pick you out?" shot Slim with a knowing wink at Ham.

"'Cause why? 'Cause 'e's a Brass-Top with understanding. 'E knows an' I knows there ain't no blyme use at all in sendin' a three-inch shell where a whoppin' naval charge is needed. 'E's got discernment, 'e 'as. 'Oo was it rigged th' seventeen hundred-volt stuff in th' barbed wires th' Fritzes naturally got electricuted with? 'Oo was it took that 'alf loot' of a division engineer th' whole 'Un code worked out—th' one they changed? It was Cocky Marmyduke Landcaster!"

"You had another name once?" asked Ham, reaching for his pipe. "Seems to me," he went on between puffs, "you got a lot o' side since old Brass-Top delegated you for th' suicide club. Seems to me a man what's been what you have been, an' where they say you've been, should naturally keep quiet. I ain't shovin' it at you—we're all together in this fight—and you're as good as me or Slim, but that Marmyduke stuff sounds too much like I was naturally going to press your royal nose with the back of my fist."

"Gawan! I, bloody well dare you to do it!"

"I've a mind to."

Cocky's face was chalk-white. For the second time that day aspersions had been cast in his direction concerning his past. He had considered his part in the fight had wiped the stain from his shield.

There were other men in Haig's army who had gone further than tap race-track wires or fantom-circuit a bucket-shop. He knew of one in the same brigade who had been a trusty at Dartmoor. Cocky, true to his creed, had never noticed the former convict. The former convict had never noticed him, though each knew the other's secret. It was only the goody-goody laymen and law-abiding citizenry that called the matter to the surface.

Slim closed the argument and prevented blows by stepping to the low door of the dugout and glancing out.

"Here's your papier-mâché nag," he announced. "It's a cross between a cadaver and a coffin. They're a dragging it on wheels."

Cocky unclenched his fists, shot a glance at Ham, then backed toward the opening.

"'E's done 'imself proud," he beamed, running his eyes over the object two sappers had brought forward. "'E's built like a stake 'orse in a sellin' race. 'E can do all of a mile in one thirty-seven an' three-fifths, 'e can. Look at 'is fetlocks, an' 'is 'aunches. 'E's got speed to burn. 'E'll tow-rope th' bloomin' field."

"Some nightmare!" grinned Slim. "Back in Canada they'd call her a dapple gray. We ain't named her yet. How about Cock-atoo?"

"'E's supposed to be a 'Un 'orse, you rotter. 'E's been dead a week."

"He has?"

"Wot 'av' you been a smellin' since th' 'eavies smashed that Fritz horse-drawn battery of 77's? Wot's th' oo de cologne we've been gettin' when th' wind's from th' East—it's this 'orse an' th' others wot's hover there." Cocky pointed his finger toward the Labyrinth, as the ruined German sector was called.

"When do you start?" injected Slim good-naturedly.

"Midnight—when th' bloomin' moon's down an' th' mists start creepin' an' creepin'."

It was later than midnight when the two linemen assisted Cocky beyond the British firing trench, then left him staggering forward with the great horse over his shoulder, and dragging behind a soft bag of instruments and an unwinding coil of No. 18 double-silk covered wire of a deep khaki color to blend with the ground.

He disappeared in the first deep shell hole, emerged upon the other side, then was gone in the low-lying night mist through which the star-shells and the search-lights could not project their yellow, penetrating rays.

He glanced back over the body of the paper horse. The British firing-line had been swallowed by the mists. The two companions were gone. He was alone in the shell-searched heart of No Man's Land. The wire he dragged was the last link with friends and comfort. Slim, or Ham, would be listening with receivers clapped to his ears for his first message, or the connection to the German line. With them would be

the two sappers who spoke German and could take shorthand.

Whatever message he succeeded in intercepting would go directly to old Brass-Top, who was busy with his serenade of heavies giving the harassed Germans no rest at all.

Cocky wormed his way toward the ridge that marked the position of the German artillery and the dead horses. This ridge connected the Labyrinth with the ruins of the Mill of the Four Winds. The mill's crumbling foundation undoubtedly sheltered German spotters who were directing the fire of batteries hidden in a wooded valley back of the Labyrinth.

Cocky gained toward his position foot by foot. The weight of the *camouflage* horse was considerable. So was the bag of instruments and the reel of wire. This, however, was lightening turn by turn.

He reached the first of the shrapnel-torn horses. Others, and wrecked caissons, were between his position and the German line. No sound came from there of discovery. The rusted barbed-wire before the battered trench was a red waste of crisscrossed death. His danger was from the observers in the mill. They, from their height, could look down upon him.

He moved each torn knee slowly, shoving the horse ahead to screen his body. Shells woofed overhead on their way to the British line. These burst with bright flares in the mist. They were the reason for his coming—they and the desire of the British high command to know when the change of troops would take place in the German first-line sector.

"It's a beastly abattoir," sniffed Cocky as he flattened out and squinted at the rotting horses about him. "Old Brass-Top ought to be 'ere a while. 'E'd know what war was then, 'e would."

Cocky loosened the string of his bag and brought out a set of telephone-receivers and an attached mouth-piece. These he clamped on the line with a pointed clip that cut through the insulation. A trailing silk cord was grounded with a trench tool. He listened.

"Ach, Emma," he whispered in the signaler's code. "Good morning, 'Am! That you, 'Am? I'm snug as a bug in a rug."

I'm out here an' over there, 'Am. Nothing yet but stink—yes, s-t-i-n-k. Got hover your bleedin' grouch, 'Am?"

Cocky grinned forgivingly as he laid the receiver on the ground and peered about him. The danger would come at dawn when the mists lifted. The Germans in the mill might detect the thin, khaki-colored cord stretching across half the width of No Man's Land. Again they might try a few pot shots at the horses out of curiosity. One bullet would serve to pierce the thin sham of the horse he would hide in, and that would be the end of a perfectly good electrician.

He worked his hand deeper in the bag at his side. His fingers spread the width of his detector. He drew it out, being careful not to clink the trench tools. He waited then for the mist to thicken. His fingers were busy with the two connections that ended in sharp iron stakes. These were the grounds. Once placed across a hidden wire, no matter how deep it was buried, the slight induced current could be detected by the Audion detector. It would be an easy matter after that to dig and tap into the German line of communication.

The mists lifted, then were churned by the currents of air set up by bursting shells. A dense vapor settled in the lowland. It rose to the ridge. Cocky climbed to his knees, grasped the detector and hurried forward where the ground had been disturbed by former digging. He moved the grounded stakes forward and backward. Each change of position brought results. He determined upon a place finally where the buzzing was strongest in his ears. Here, below, was the busy German line that ran to the mill. Orders and the results of shell impacts were flowing back and forth.

Cocky brawled to the sham horse and moved it over the spot where he intended to dig. He brought up the spool of field-wire and the receivers. Then, intrenched, he started with a sword bayonet until he had a shallow ditch as long as his body. He deepened this in the center till, with a thrill of satisfaction, he scraped bare a fine strand of wax-insulated wire.

"Come here my beauty," he chuckled as he lifted it with his little finger, being care-

ful not to snap it where the tool had nicked the copper.

His listening in was a work of art. It was not necessary to sever the German line. This would have been fatal. He dropped a ground, wrapped the bare place he scraped in the line with his field instrument's lead, then lowered his face to hear the better, as he pressed the microphone-receiver to his ear.

"*Wie gehts heute, Heinrich?*" he heard distinctly. It was followed by a perfect torrent of interpolated conversation in German between the two terminals.

"Gor blyme!" grinned Cocky, "this his worth comin' for. 'E says '*Wee gayts*' as if 'e knew I'd just dropped him on th' line."

Cocky moved on his side and pressed his ear against the receiver.

Orders thick and fast in South German were still setting the receiver diaphragms vibrating.

"'Ere goes!" he decided. "I missed my bloomin' education when I didn't learn their lingo. I'll give it to 'Am, or one of th' sappers. Them sappers knows everything—even Dutch."

Cocky unwound his connection, scraped bare a loop in the field-line that ran to the British trenches, then wrapped this tightly, finishing the job like a Western Union splice with insulating tape.

"They can get th' 'ole bloomin' thing now," he grinned as he rolled over and tried to pierce the mist for stars that must be smiling down on him. "They can get it all—they're connected an' they're on th' bloomin' job. Gor blyme, I wish I 'ad a smoke!"

Disdaining heroics or the danger of listening in, Cocky made himself comfortable and waited for the dawn. A certain increase in the British fire told him in no uncertain voice that old Brass-Top was getting information through the single strand of wire that was valuable to him.

The German guns began their answer. To Cocky they seemed much nearer than the British. He wondered if they were located directly over the ridge. He saw, as he lolled on his stretched arms, a flock of "pineapples" and "rum-jars" come hurt-

ling like lazy birds from the German line. Some struck among the barbed wire of the British front. Their roar and reverberation as they exploded rocked the earth even up to the ridge. The morning serenade and exchange of compliments deepened into a drum fire, and then to a hurricane of lashing artillery.

The two fronts blazed with white light. Burnt powder filled the air. The earth trembled. Shrapnel burst over the German's position at the ruined mill. The snappy roll of the lights was drowned by the continuous boom of the heavies. Cocky sat up and plugged his ears.

"Gor blyme, I got a seat in th' bloody gallery of this. 'Ell's broke loose!"

Hell *had* broken loose. It was a crescendo of increasing gun-fire for which there was no note too high to reach. The hate between the Germans and the Canadians had reached the breaking strain. The stored shells in the ammunition dumps were being fed to the guns by half naked men gone mad with blood-lust. The advance trenches yeasted with suicide clubs who were on tiptoe to die in the coming rush across No Man's Land.

Cocky flattened himself out. He edged toward the paper horse. There was room inside of it to hide from observation. It would be no shelter at all for the flying splinters of case-hardened steel.

The sun rose through the red haze of war. It was like a great orange. Its coming was the signal for a tornado of shells from the British heavies. They "woofed" over Cocky till he would have sworn they darkened the light of day. Their bursting charges of T. N. T. flattened out the last of the German firing-line.

After the heavy shells came a shower of creeping shrapnel that churned the baked earth and advanced like a Kansas cyclone. Behind this crept the units of the bombing and suicide squads. The fringe of the first barrage reached the first of the dead horses upon the ridge. Cocky groaned as he pressed himself into the smallest space possible. The end was in sight.

A shell burst directly over him. Its shock seemed to first lift, then flatten, him to a pancake. He heard above the rack

and crash of war the shouts of the maddened Canadians. Officers barked orders. The barrage reached the ridge and the ruined mill. A crack of doomsday rent the swirling air. Cocky, half on his knees, felt a slash across his head, a blow as of falling mountains. He crumpled in a heap, and then no more.

His awakening was a series of jolts and pains. He dreamed of being carried for miles and leagues. He heard the stretcher-bearers cursing his weight. A bandage and the smell of picric acid were about his head. It ached.

Afterward he was in an ambulance, jolting over the shell-pitted roads of northern France. There were three others in that ambulance. He found strength to raise his head and count them. They were on shelves like mummies in a museum. Cocky caught a glimpse of a ruined skyline that was familiar.

"Wipers! Gor blyme, it's Wipers," he muttered.

His next awakening was the ward of a busy hospital. Here also were bleeding stumps of men—the heroes of a red yesterday.

No one of all of them groaned or complained. This was strange to Cocky. He felt like voicing his opinion of a number of things. His head, for instance, felt like an all-night bout with green beer and stale wine. It rocked and roared. It split and grated where the bandage was tightest. The picric he learned from a strong-faced nurse was there to heal a burn. The thing that had dropped upon him out in No Man's Land was a German incendiary bomb loaded with Roumanian kerosene.

It was a week before he had secured all the details of that morning's fight. There had been glory enough in it for ten brigades. There was also considerable deference paid to him which he did not fully grasp. The little doctor with soft brown eyes and hurt mouth had called him Marmyduke Landcaster, which was flattering. It was far better than "English Joe," or "Cocky-with-a-Past." The nurse had brought flowers which were on a stand at the head of the cot with the picric and the

cigarettes. These flowers were English roses.

"If 'Am an' Slim could see me now," was Cocky's mental note. "I'm a bleedin' lord, I am."

The British heavies were barking again for another smash at the German line when Cocky saw the stir in the ward that marked the coming of distinguished visitors. He drew the white sheet up over his head, and waited with both huge ears wide open for bouquets or compliments.

The visitors were passing through the long rows of cots. One stopped at each with a word of cheer or a hearty British "buck up!"

Cocky recognized the gruff voice of old Brass-Top. Another voice was American, and familiar. He stiffened like a cold corpse as the two stood by the side of his cot. The major had lifted his card at the foot of the cot, with his name and the temperature readings. The visitor stood close by his side.

"This is the man," said the major. "Before you look him over for identification I want to tell you how he happened to come to this hospital."

"Hit's all off," breathed Cocky, with visions of bars before him.

"This lad, sergeant," continued the major, "crawled out into the heart of No Man's Land and tapped the German line where it ran from the Mill of the Four Winds to the Labyrinth—two thorns in our side. We obtained most valuable information in this manner concerning the changes of German troops. The Prussian Guard—the Kaiser's own—came in to their position as the other outfit went out. Naturally there was confusion. We struck at the

psychological moment. We smashed through and gained all of eighteen hundred yards on a three-mile front due to the information this man secured for us."

Cocky swelled under the sheet. He moved his arm slightly and pried one lid open to a crack. Old Brass-Top was facing the visitor. His wink was pronounced. The visitor nodded, turned, and said:

"I'll take a look at him—I may have the wrong man."

Again old Brass-Top winked—this time with a merry twinkle. The visitor rolled back the corner of the sheet. Cocky grew rigid. The light through his clamped lids burned to his reeling brain. The flesh under the bandage seared and blazed with hectic fire. The bent head of the visitor shadowed the light. The breath came to Cocky as a blast from a desert. The head lifted finally with an exclamation of forced doubt:

"This isn't English Joe, major. It isn't him at all! I'm sorry to have troubled you, major. I never saw this man before in my life. The boys at Scotland Yard have made some mistake."

"I'm glad of that!" blurted the major with another wink and a lifting of his gray-thatched brows. "I hardly thought a lad who would do what this lad did, would be wanted by the police."

"Same here!" drawled the visitor from overseas. "It was just a mistake—this chap has *such* an innocent face! I'm going back to New York and report that it isn't English Joe—at all."

"That's bloomin' white of you, Mr. Detective-Sergeant Caspari," said Cocky to himself, as old Brass-Top and the detective hurried out through the doorway of the hospital.



GOOD ADVICE

BY HAROLD SETON

WE should undo
Each German slander,
Nor listen to
Impropaganda!

The Triple Cross

by Octavus Roy Cohen
and J. U. Giesy

Authors of "The Matrimoniae," "The Reckless Age," "Nothing But the Truth," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SIGNAL.

"FOR each man kills the thing he loves."

Celeste Rantoul dragged her weary limbs into the quiet of her own room rather than walked. The quotation from the writings of a queer, vanished genius had waked in her brain as she came there from Boyd's suite. She sank into a chair in straight-armed, clasp-handed, half-bent posture she had affected so often of late, and sat staring at the floor. After a bit her lips moved without sound as they formed the words:

"For each man kills the thing he loves."

She shuddered. That was her choice, it seemed; that was the task to which all her work, all her striving of years, had brought her—to kill the thing she loved. Now at the last, with success within her grasp, that was the final price she must pay, the final sacrifice she must make to the nation she served, and this other nation, its ally, its wonderful, strong, virile ally, which could save it from its threatened fate. She must kill the thing she loved.

She bit her lip. The horror of this morning was strong in her brain. It rankled, revolted, sickened her in her soul. And

Hugo Wagner, light-haired, blue-eyed, so oftentimes smiling; Hugo, who had seemed yesterday so worried when Fischer had shown he did not wholly trust her; Hugo had helped Fischer to bring that horror about. It was the truth, unless Boyd had lied, and she felt he had not.

She had known Boyd for years. He was a strong man; a man clean in his mind, as she believed him clean in his body until now—until Fischer and Hugo had finished their work. She admired him as any natural woman must admire a clean, virile man, and even while she had seemingly plotted to betray him to the fate he had met, she had gloried in what she had learned of his work, because she had never meant it to fall into the hands of those who thought her their agent, those deceitful enemy agents she had tricked. All along she had meant to get those plans—as she had. She meant to keep them—puzzle and baffle Fischer and his men so wholly that Kremlin would be called to their aid. And then—those plans were to be given to America and France.

She caught a quivering breath. And now the plans were gone. Where she did not know. Where she had been unable to find out. But they were gone. Was that, then, not another reason why she must not fail.

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when Kremlin came to this house? They must be regained or America might perish—America and France. So it was no longer that she could save the lives of Dorothy and Boyd, and give the man his chance to overcome the vile poison Fischer had injected into his veins in a fit of baffled rage. It was not that alone. It was something greater than any one or two lives, for which she, Celeste Rantoul, must kill the thing she loved.

Love to some souls comes with the beauty of a sunrise all pink and blue and gold, with a sweet air of promise blowing into the windows of the mind. And to some love comes with the sudden stroke of a lightning flash; and to some it may come with a majesty almost elemental in its grandeur, yet bearing with it something sinister, like the awesome beauty of an impending storm.

Such a love was the love of Celeste Rantoul. It had come upon her against her will—not wholly, but in part. She had resisted it, fought it, been almost terrified, almost horrified at times by its waking. She had even sought to strangle it unborn, because she had felt it hopeless from the beginning. She had felt toward it perhaps as a mother may to an incurably deformed child—a wonderful yearning more painful than the flesh pangs of birth, yet back of even that a terrible, almost prayerful, wish that it might die, because it could never take its proper place in the scheme of worldly life.

Yet love at times dies hard, and perhaps her very resistance toward her passion for a man of an enemy race, a son of those very peoples who were seeking to blot her people out; a man of the blood of men who had forsworn and forsaken respect of woman save as a means of their birth or their enjoyment; who held not their hands from virgin innocence or infant weakness, in their lust for power through rapine and blood; men who could do what Fischer and Hugo had done this morning, without hesitation, for no gain save to glut a spite aroused by their defeat—perhaps that had made her love more tenacious, stronger, until it did not die, but lived as a crippled child or a crippled plant will live, while other and seemingly more perfect specimens die.

Hope, too, dies hard, else man would oft-times die after hope were dead. And because of that it may be that Celeste Rantoul, sitting in her room, torn on the wrack whose two ends were love and duty, gave birth out of her travail after a time to a poor, little, forlorn hope, so faint that it scarcely stirred. Yet she lifted it to her breast and gazed upon it, and knew it for what it was—her own, poor, pitiful hope, which like everything else, as it seemed to her today, might very soon die, but was now a hope none the less.

Oddly enough, it was Hugo Wagner's own words which acted as the germinal impulse in her brain to bring about the birth of that hope. Yesterday morning, when she crept to him in the first grip of the fear inspired by her discovery of Dorothy's presence; when they had talked in intimate fashion; when her heart had yearned to him, because at the last his face had worn that strangely boyish, wistful look, he had cried out for a renewed faith in man, in woman, and in God.

Surely then, she told herself now, he was not lost to all those things mankind had once held supremely fine, supremely sacred; surely he had kept through all the damning, destroying, blunting, debasing mass of doctrine in which the leaders had steeped their people, some latent memory of those things which could be stirred. Unlike Fischer and Kremlin and their men and women agents all over the land, he had not forsaken all those finer things of life, or prostituted them wholly to the mere power of a desire for power. He had kept some little inner shrine of the older human decencies untouched.

Might he not then have done—say what he did this morning—not of desire; not because he approved, but because he could do nothing else, because to refuse or resist, or to even seem to rebel at what was being done, would have brought him into disrepute with the men under whom he served?

Rather sordid that, of course, that just for self he should disregard those larger moral duties which at times a man or woman must choose to support or disgrace, but better surely, she told her weary heart,

than that he should have approved Fischer's dreadful act.

In very truth then Celeste Rantoul was fighting for the object of her love, if not for love itself. If to-night Kremlin were to be trapped; if she brought that about, oh, surely, surely for such a service she could claim a reward; and that reward would be that Hugo should not be made to suffer what was meted out to the rest.

If he would but give her some sign that the thing had been repugnant to him; if she could feel sure that deep in his soul, where it had been crushed by the teachings of those doctrines he upheld, there was still an element of the true and divine manhood's fire, then surely she would not need to *kill* the thing she loved. *Lose* it, and with it hope of love itself, yes! What she might do would do that, of course, but her very love might still make its object safe.

Hours had passed as she sat there waging her silent battle alone. Now as she reached her final conclusion she noted that the day was failing, dusk creeping into the room. She rose and went to her door, setting it open. Carrying her wan little hope all unseen, she stepped into the hall and rapped on Hugo's door. Whether he were there or not she did not know, but she meant to find him, put him to a final test, and see whether or not he would support that hope of hers he had fathered with his words.

Steps crossed the room behind the door where she stood. As on the morning before Hugo set it open and stared into the white, set face of the girl in the hall.

"Paula! Did you want me?" he said, speaking quickly. Once more he was in trousers and shirt. He had been changing his clothing, she thought.

She nodded, and stepped inside his room.

"Kremlin comes to-night?" she inquired.

"Yes. I was just getting ready to drive in and meet him. Won't you sit down?" Wagner moved forward a chair. "You look fagged out, Paula. Just what is wrong?" He bent his glance upon her in an almost searching way.

"I'm all right." Celeste sat down. "What time does Kremlin come?"

"About half-past ten; that is, if his train is on time. We ought to get back here about then."

"He will stay here to-night?"

"Hardly." Hugo shook his head with a smile. "He's coming out here merely for a consultation with Fischer. The doctor has rather fallen down in what he attempted to do."

Celeste's little hope quivered. Had it been stronger it might have cried out in pain. There had been an almost flippant tone to Wagner's words. It was almost as though in some way he were amused at Fischer's failure, and considered it as nothing else. But she had come for a purpose, and she meant to carry it out.

"Hugo," she said in a voice not quite steady, despite her determination, "you know what he—Fischer—did to-day?"

"You mean to Boyd?" Wagner, fastening his collar, paused in the act.

Celeste inclined her head. But from Wagner's grimace over the finding of the button in his shirt, there had been little to feed her hope in his face.

And he answered in what seemed an off-hand manner: "Why, yes—I was there. Boyd told you, I suppose. Honestly, Paula, that chap has nerve. He faced Fischer down to the last, and right at the first he tried to kill the old boy."

"He told me you helped Fischer give him the injection," Celeste went on with dry lips which seemed stiff to her own perception as they moved.

Once more Hugo gave her a quickly searching glance.

"*Herr Gott*, what else could I do when I was there for that very purpose?" he inquired.

"Don't!" Suddenly Celeste let the word escape her more like a cry of pleading than a predetermined word.

"Don't what?" Hugo came quickly toward her to pause beside her chair. "See here, Paula, if—"

"Don't say *Herr Gott*," she broke out in passionate protest. "Don't use God's name in connection with an act like that. Hugo, why did Fischer do it? To what purpose—what end?"

And now into the gaze Wagner was bend-

ing upon her there crept for a single instant something she did not see, because she was not looking into his face. But it was something wholly tender; something which wrapped her from the crown of her brown head to the tip of her slender foot beneath her skirt, in a silent caress. It was yearning; it was a thing almost of pleasure, and yet it was the caress, the yearning, the pleasure one feels in something in an abstruse or detached way. It was as though Hugo Wagner realized her beauty, her fineness, and renounced them for all time. Then it was gone, and he made his reply:

"Why, to tell the truth, Fischer was crazy mad. I think he was very sure Boyd would break down under his threats, and when the fellow assaulted him instead and refused to loosen his tongue, the doctor set out for revenge. You know, Paula, people who get in Fischer's way can rather expect to get hurt. That's his doctrine and ours—win or destroy—is it not?"

"Win or destroy." The woman in the chair knotted her fingers. Win or destroy. Yes, that was the code of Fischer and the men above them, of them all, as Hugo said. Only—could he know how he was destroying that little, new-born hope she had brought into this room. She gripped her fingers closer and closer into her palms to keep from crying out, to keep from screaming her protest of his words.

"But to do that," she said, when the first death-pang of hope was past. "And it did no good."

"Not a bit." Hugo shook his head. "If America had more men like Boyd, it would go a lot different with our plans—and a lot different with us, too, I suspect. They wouldn't chuck us into a comfortable prison and let sentimentalists send us flowers. They'd slam us up against a wall and chuck us into the earth about five minutes later."

He laughed in a rather hard way.

"They call America the melting-pot," he went on, "and have for years, but as a matter of fact nothing ever melted in it yet. They've got the pot and the ingredients all right, but they've never built a hot enough fire to really make things melt. This country needs a little bit of

hell to wake it up. It takes hell-fire, Paula, to melt the souls of men, some terrible individual or national stress."

Hope quivered with another pain of dissolution. He could laugh in discussing such things as this! Celeste Rantoul steadied her voice.

"Isn't that really the trouble with our *schrecklichkeit*, Hugo? Does it do what we intend, what we expect? Does it not rather furnish that very stress which melts the souls of the men or nations against which it is put into effect, and bring them out stronger, purer, more refined than ever before? Isn't that why we have beaten nations, but not crushed them? Are we not perhaps ourselves playing with a fire which may be turned against us ourselves in time?"

Wagner shrugged as he picked up his coat and slipped it on.

"Perhaps," he agreed. "But there are two ways of overcoming resistance; either to change it or destroy it. Those above us have chosen the latter way. As a result Belgium and Servia lie under our heel, together with northern France and a large part of western Russia, and America is rotten with our agents, who are eating away the strength of her body politic and so making her an impotent giant."

Celeste curled her lips. "So that while we prate of force we are winning by treachery instead."

"Yet treachery," said Hugo Wagner, "is a certain force, after all, is it not?"

Hope quivered again, but very faintly now. It had not had a very long life. "I suppose there is no use discussing it, really," Celeste rejoined. "You are ready to go?" Her tone was weary; there was something even listless in the way she spoke.

"There is no hurry," Hugo told her, and dropped down to a seat on the bed.

"And what will Kremlin do when he comes?" said Celeste.

"I think he'll succeed in making Boyd speak."

"How?" A tense note crept into the question. "How can he, after what Boyd resisted to-day?"

Hugo frowned. "Well, Fischer and I

have talked that over, but frankly, Paula, it's hardly a subject I want to take up with you."

And suddenly as he spoke some of the fire went out of his companion's manner. She twisted about to face him fully, and her eyes were wide and dark with an added horror, as they searched his features for some confirming sign of what he meant.

"You mean—Mrs. Boyd?" she said in a sibilant whisper at last.

Wagner frowned again. "Well, that's what Fischer thinks. You know it was Kremlin who ordered her brought here after Fischer had told you she would be taken somewhere else. He undoubtedly had a reason for that. And of course we all know that Boyd loves her, and there is hardly any need of my saying the rest, is there? We didn't bring either one of them here to be balked of our object, you know."

Celeste Rantoul rose slowly to her feet. Her mind was made up, and hope was quite dead. It did not even quiver now. It was cold—as cold as her heart in her breast; as cold as her body felt, so that it wanted to shiver with the chill of sheer nervous horror. Cold and stiff that little hope; as stiff as her lips felt, as her lids seemed over her eyes, too dry to weep; as stiff as her tongue, which would only move in a faltering way as she asked a final question:

"And you're going to get Kremlin, and bring him out here—for—that?"

"I told you I'd rather not discuss it, Paula," Hugo replied as he also rose from his seat. "As for Kremlin, I have his orders to meet him at the train."

"And I mustn't delay your obedience to orders." Celeste turned toward the door.

Hugo set it open for her. "Good-by, Paula," he said.

"Good-by," she answered, and meant it.

She stumbled to her own door and through it; switched on a light. She was alone. Hope she had left behind in the other room. Hope was dead, but purpose still lived. Her mind was made up. Her lips set, and deep in her eyes there waked a steady light of determination. Hope was dead, and love was dead, but duty still lived on—that great duty to which she had devoted years of her life, to which she had

sworn allegiance—duty to America, to France, to humanity; and now it seemed—since Hugo had spoken of Kremlin's probable intent—to God.

So much in her own life was dead, but there was other life she could save; Boyd's life, and that of the little bride she had betrayed to this frightful peril not of life alone, but of something more terrible still when Kremlin should come to Fischer's house. Yes, she, Celeste, for whom life held little now, could save the very life of chastity itself for that innocent girl-wife on whom for months she had spied in order to bring this very moment about. She could keep her at least from being sullied by these men who would lay their destroying hands even upon the sanctity of a bride. And in so doing she would be true to her duty to France.

France! Ravishment! Her lips curved coldly. Like her purpose now, even her smile was cold. Only her eyes were hot, blazing with a deadly inward fire. Hugo had hinted at a blow aimed at a woman, to further the aims of these men. And France was a woman—the eternal woman of the nations. The race from whom these men were drawn had sought to ravish France.

Their assault had been brutal, callous, without mercy, with shame thrown aside. Only, France had repulsed them; wounded she stood at bay, like a beautiful woman, defending that sacred trust of woman against impious hands. And she, Celeste Rantoul, a woman also—wounded in her heart, but clean in all else—was a servant of the greater woman; a servant of France. Her rounded bust rose over the air of a deeper inhalation. She closed her eyes and lifted her face. She threw out her arms in a wide, almost venerating, gesture. Her lips moved.

"Ah, France," she whispered. "I love thee, France!"

Love? That were the greater love speaking now; the better love; forgetful of self, thinking of others—of a nation, a cause, a principle of others who like herself had loved and lost, had sacrificed even more than herself. Of widows and orphans; of all other women had given to France—to

the mother, that others who were to come after might still call themselves not slaves of a barbarous code, but children of France.

So at the last, with cold fingers, she reached for the switch of the light in her room. She pressed it. The light went out Celeste gasped. The sound was a shudder in the darkened room.

Then with utter deliberation she switched the light on. It flared out sharply. She quenched its ray again. Again and again she repeated the trick, her lips moving in time to her fingers. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven.

The thing was done. She drew back from the switch and sank into her chair. Out there in the darkness Celeste Rantoul knew a pair of eyes were watching; had been watching through two nights. Eleven times her light had winked. Eleven o'clock those eyes would know as the hour when those to whom they were to carry word should strike.

And yet, now that it was done, the light which had flashed in the dark eyes of Celeste Rantoul was dead, like that little hope which had died before it. After a time men would come, grim-faced and determined, and Kremlin and Fischer and Hugo Wagner and their men would be caught in that trap she had worked for long months to build. They would take them and set Boyd and Dorothy free. But the thought seemed some way to bring no elation, now that it was nearly an accomplished thing. She was very pale as she sat there and knew what she had done; very pale and very wan and slender, again no more than a woman who sat and suffered alone.

Far out on the road to the city, Hugo Wagner, glancing back at the house he had left, searching for the room of the woman with whom he had spoken before he left, thinking far more of her than of his mission to the city, saw the light in her room blink out. But because he must drive his car carefully through the darkness, he turned his head again and did not see it wink and blink again.

Wherefore he paid small attention to the roaring of a motorcycle which after a time woke to life. Nor did he attach any im-

portance to the fact that it came up behind him swiftly, passed in a smother of dust kicked up by its speeding wheels, and winked a tiny red eye briefly before him, as it fled on down the road.

CHAPTER XXI.

KREMLIN.

WAGNER merely watched the red eye fade out, and drove on. He had started early, and there was no particular hurry. He would have plenty of time in the city before Kremlin's train arrived. The haste would come on the back trip, when he hurried the head of the Intelligence Work in America back to Fischer's house for that conference to which he had come all the way from New York.

He would be in a topping bad humor, would Kremlin, at the mix-up in their arrangements to obtain the ray-rifle plans. Kremlin was a disciplinarian, a martinet, a man who figured things out to the last detail of efficient performance. Wherefore Hugo imagined that some one would sweat for what had occurred the other night.

Kremlin's time was too valuable a thing, too taken up, for a bungle on the part of some agent to chase him around the country straightening things out. Hugo knew just about what he would do. He would be very calm and very cold until the thing was completed and done. Then he would fasten on the one he believed guilty of the miscarriage of the original plan, and that one would suffer, no matter who he might be. Kremlin would not knowingly have an inefficient cog in his machine.

He was waiting when the string of coaches pulled in from the East. But he lifted two fingers to the vizor of his chauffeur's cap only, when the large, stern-faced man appeared through the gates. He did not salute as he would have saluted in, say, Fischer's house.

For William Kremlin was a man of large affairs—a man well known for years in the city, a power in local commercial circles and in politics. The mayor was an intimate friend of his. Kremlin was an Amer-

ican in all but birth. He was regarded as an American by nearly all who knew him.

Only the inner circle knew different; knew him for one of Germany's most loyal workers on this side of the Atlantic. He did not even look the part. Tall he was, and dark, and clean-shaven, with an iron jaw and a tight-set mouth. Brought to America as a lad, his accent was that of the western nation. But there was nothing to in any way point suspicion toward William Kremlin in manner or appearance.

It would have been odd, therefore, to see his chauffeur give him that flat-handed salute here at Chicago's station. It might have caused comment even, now that America was far enough awake to begin to look about for the spies in her midst. Therefore Hugo merely touched his cap and took Kremlin's grips from the hands of the depot attendant, lifting them aboard the waiting machine.

Also he gave his head the least possible shake in response to a quick glance of Kremlin's shrewd, dark eye. It was an answer to a silent question. It meant that the ray-rifle plans had not been found.

Kremlin tossed the red cap a tip and climbed to his seat while Hugo held the door. Hugo sprang up behind the wheel. He slid his gears and they were off for Fischer's home.

And now Wagner drove with speed. His glance from Kremlin's eyes had shown him the mind of the man he had known very well before he had been sent to act as Kremlin's representative with Fischer in the ray-rifle affair. This night was apt to settle the matter, he thought. He bent over his wheel and drove with tight-set lips and a little frown between his watching eyes. Yes, Hugo told himself, everything would be settled after Kremlin entered Fischer's house. Before to-night the thing would be over, and Boyd and his wife would know their fate. Kremlin would show no mercy to those who resisted his will. He never had. And what would Fischer do?

Hugo narrowed his eyes along the path of light before the racing, swaying car. Fischer half-suspected Paula. But he was undecided about the girl, he felt sure. And still—would he name her to Kremlin as

one who might have played them false. He set his lips more closely as he drove. Well, let him. Despite all the sort of work they had to do, there was something very fine about Paula Harris, and Wagner, Kremlin's man, was minded to see that no great harm came to that girl.

When everything concerning the ray-rifle was settled he was determined to see to that. He thought he would suggest that she leave the sort of work she had been doing. It was no work for a woman who had the sort of heart she had exhibited since she knew Mrs. Boyd had been brought to Fischer's house. It was no work for any one who had still kept any element of human compassion in her breast. That sort of thing destroyed an agent's value.

Wagner laughed without sound. Fine thoughts he was thinking. If he kept on, his own value would be gone, when his love for the slim, dark Paula could make him so solicitous of any one person's fate. Anyway, as he had said before, women were the devil. They softened a man, made him less of the thinking brute.

Automatically he swerved the car. He entered that road along which he had carried Boyd and Paula two nights before. Swinging and swaying, he sent it along. A glance at the clock on the dash showed him it was nearly half past ten o'clock. And there was the house. He turned into the drive, ran up it, and ground the machine to a stop, sprang out, and opened the door.

The house door opened, too, as Kremlin climbed out. Fischer himself appeared at the head of the steps.

"Excellency!" he exclaimed as Kremlin mounted toward him.

"Good evening, Fischer," Kremlin responded shortly and passed him to enter the house.

Oddly enough, in seeming, Hugo, the chauffeur followed on the heels of the other two men. But then he was Kremlin's man, no matter how he appeared in his trim-fitting livery. He entered Fischer's room, remaining standing until Kremlin had flung himself into a chair. And then he took a seat. He was the man who, with Fischer, through Paula Harris, had engineered the whole proposition under Kremlin's orders.

And Kremlin wasted no breath in useless persiflage now he was on the ground. His eyes flashed briefly about the room, and came back to little Fischer standing beside his big desk.

"So you bungled?" he sneered.

"Excellency," Fischer stammered, "everything was done as planned."

"Except to get the plans. You did everything except what you were set to accomplish." Kremlin's eyes once more searched the room swiftly. "Well, where is that girl?"

"In her room, excellency." Fischer licked his lips with an almost nervous tongue. Now that his own welfare was at stake he could show emotion, it seemed.

"Get her, Hugo," Kremlin snapped and leaned back in his seat.

"*Recht, Herr!*" Wagner left the room.

He mounted the stairs and tapped on Paula's door, waited until she opened, and told her she was wanted below.

"Kremlin wants me?" she questioned, and lifted a hand to her breast.

Wagner nodded. "Yes."

Paula stepped into the hall. To Hugo she seemed pale, almost haggard. He took her by the arm.

"Tell him just what happened, and nothing more," he whispered. "You've never met him, but I know him well. Don't—don't be afraid?"

"Afraid?" She gave him a glance he remembered for many a long day after. "Afraid, Hugo? Do you think I am afraid?" And suddenly, most surprisingly, she smiled.

"Kremlin is the devil when he's angry," Hugo said.

"Then let us descend and interview—the devil." Paula moved toward the stairs. Her face still wore that strangely enigmatic smile.

And it was still on her lips as she entered Fischer's room and was presented to Kremlin, the active head of Germany's spies in the United States.

"Excellency, I have long hoped for this moment," she said, inclining her head and sinking into a chair Hugo placed. Nor could the man she addressed know how very true were those words, how pregnant

with a different meaning from that which appeared upon their surface.

He acknowledged them with a quick jerk of his head.

"And now," he resumed the conversation he had broken off with Fischer upon her entrance, "who was it drove the other car which brought the Boyd woman out?"

"Marx, *Herr*," Fischer replied.

"And there was no trouble with her."

"None, *Herr*."

"But Boyd fought, and Hugo knocked him out."

"Yes, *Herr*—that is correct."

"And when he was brought in and searched there was no trace of the plans."

"None, *Herr*, save a bit of red wax in his pocket."

"So—" Kremlin picked that up quickly. "He had the plans upon him at the start?"

"That is my opinion, *Herr*." Fischer turned his eyes upon Paula Harris as he spoke.

But Kremlin looked at Wagner. "You saw no sign of the things at the time of the struggle, Hugo?"

"*Herr!*" Wagner replied with an exclamation.

Kremlin frowned. "*Ach*—be not so quick, Hugo. Wait till I accuse. I shall not be backward, if I think it justified."

"Nothing, *Herr*." Hugo resumed the seat from which he had started at Kremlin's question.

"It was you, Miss Harris, who suggested the manner of Boyd's capture, who really worked up this entire attempt on the ray-rifle plans, was it not?" Kremlin now addressed the woman whose presence he had desired.

"Yes, excellency," she declared.

"You were with him in the cab?"

"Yes, *Herr*." Not a tremor shook the young voice. In all outward seeming, Paula Harris was wholly at ease as she faced this keen, cold-eyed inquisitor, who had come not only to assure the success of the attempt which had failed, but to punish the one responsible for the failure as well.

And Kremlin regarded her closely before he turned slowly to Fischer and fixed his glance on the little chemist's face. "Well

—Fischer—well, where are your brains?" he said.

And Fischer nodded slowly, while Hugo Wagner watched. "I have thought of it, excellency," he returned with what seemed hesitation. "But what of the motive?"

"Damn the motive!" Kremlin snorted. "We are not dealing with motives—but facts."

He heaved his muscular figure about to once more fix Miss Harris with his gaze. "Where are those plans, young woman?" he inquired.

"I do not know." Not a lash of the dark figure above her dark eyes quivered as she made her answer. Truth—a very passion of truth—rang in her words. Even past Kremlin's conviction it seemed to strike and give the man pause.

He frowned again and seemed to consider—to weigh and balance before he spoke to Fischer again: "Has she been searched?"

"*Nein*," the doctor said. "*Herr*—why should it be? Paula is the one who, as you have said, has worked upon this matter for months, who furnished us first with our information concerning the rifle, who arranged for bringing Boyd here. Why should Paula make way with the plans? Searched she has not been, but forbidden to leave the house she was, and when I searched Boyd's rooms, and he threatened to assault me, it was Paula drew a weapon and bade him cease."

"So?" Kremlin accepted when the doctor had paused. "Well—that I did not know until now."

Hugo Wagner rose. He approached Kremlin where he sat. He bent and whispered briefly in his ear. And Kremlin started. Something like a smile of craft, or the appreciation of craft, twitched briefly at his lips.

"So, Hugo." He broke out in a softer speech than he had used before. "That I did not know also, but I might have known that you would think of it."

Then, without divulging what it was the younger man had conveyed to his knowledge in those few sibilant words, he swung to Fischer again. "This Boyd proves obdurate?"

"As I told you, *Herr*."

"What have you done?"

Fischer told him in a very few words.

"And he resisted even that?" Kremlin made scowling comment at the last. "You overplayed your hand, doctor, in letting him know that there could be no escape for him in the end. You should have not been so quick to disabuse his mind of the idea of a parole after the matter was ended, at least. You robbed him of hope too soon. You should have held that as a bait before his eyes."

Fischer winced at even so mild a condemnation from his chief. "But, excellency, you are right, of course. Only—the man's pig-headed stubbornness of resistance angered me greatly. That he should think to defy me—us."

"Angered you?" Suddenly Kremlin sat up in his chair. "Angered you? *Herr Gott*, how many times must I tell you that in this work of ours none of the emotions have a place. We are not to feel; not to think beyond thoughts of our work and those things necessary to its success. We are to obey. Fischer, you are a fool!"

"*Herr!*" Fischer drew back before Kremlin's outburst. "*Herr*, I—"

"A fool!" Kremlin went on, belying his former words by his own manner. "A poor, doddering fool! You were angry! What business had you to get angry at such a time? You find there has been some miscarriage of our plans, and you get angry instead of remaining calm and seeking the explanation. You grow angry and destroy the one remaining chance of gaining what we sought through the one who had it in his possession. You tell a man he must die, whether you get it or not, and then try to persuade him, threaten him, torture him into giving it to you. Bah! A child would know better than that. Fischer, you have failed in the great work of your life. You have failed, and we have no use for men who fail. Do you understand?"

Dr. Frederick Fischer, Ph.D., grew deadly pale. In fact, he could have been hardly paler had he been actually dead.

"*Ja, Herr*," he said, "I understand. I have failed—this once—I, who have worked these past three years and failed

not until now. I, who have been diligent and faithful in this region to which I was assigned, who have had no other thought save to obey as you have said, have failed at last. And I have failed, not through any desire of my own, but because something I could not foresee occurred. Despite all my knowledge of our aims, our organization, of all my work, this failure is held against me. That is my reward." His voice quivered somewhat and broke off.

"There is no reward for them who fail," Kremlin sneered.

"Then," said Fischer very slowly in a tone which rumbled strangely in his throat, "my services are at an end?"

"After this matter is finished," Kremlin replied.

Something tense, sinister, seemed to creep into the room and drape itself between the two men; the local chief and the head of all the work in the nation. It hung there between them, dark, like a pall. It did not move. There was no sound. And through it the two stared, one at the other, until, at length, once more Fischer's lips moved.

"Despite all my knowledge, Kremlin?"

And after that the silence came down again and the pall still hung there between the two men, who stared through it at one another.

Kremlin's movement was almost as swift as light. The little black instrument of death seemed to leap almost by magic into his hand. "You'd threaten, would you, you dog?" he cried out harshly, and fired straight into Fischer's face.

Paula Harris screamed, shrinking back in her chair.

"Kremlin!" Wagner cried out, hurling himself toward his chief, his face aghast at this sudden tragic culmination of the situation. "Kremlin—for God's sake!" He laid hold of the man.

But Kremlin shook himself loose. He gestured with the hand which still held the smoking weapon, to where Fischer had sunk down in a pitiful, huddled posture, half sitting, with his back against the side of the desk.

"You saw what happened, Wagner?" he said in a perfectly quiet manner. "I re-

buked him, and he went into the room there behind the desk and shot himself without a word. Here—take the gun and drag the body into that room before he bleeds all over the floor. Quick, man, before one of his guards comes in!" He thrust the little automatic into Hugo's hands.

And Hugo took it. While Paula covered her face with shaking hands to hide the blood-streaked mask which had been Fischer's face, he went over, lifted the body, and hurried with it through the door of the little work-room, back of the desk.

And Kremlin went swiftly to the door of Fischer's room and jerked it open, just as a guard was lifting his hand to rap. "Oh, so you're there, are you?" he grunted. "Dr. Fischer just shot himself and is dead. Return to your station until you receive further orders." He closed the door and returned.

Paula Harris shuddered. What new horror would follow next, she asked herself. Fischer was dead! Five minutes ago he was still the head of the unit for which she had worked for more than a year. Now he was a corpse in that other room. And Hugo had accepted Kremlin's words—Kremlin the murderer's lies—as a matter of course. He had taken Kremlin's orders and done what he said. This was Kremlin's justice; what any who dared question his authority might expect. Fischer had dared to threaten and Fischer had died. What mercy could any one expect from such men as Kremlin and his agents? What mercy was there for Boyd and his wife or any one unless—unless—

Surely her signal must have been seen, and surely it must be eleven o'clock. Surely—surely! By an effort she lowered her hands and saw Kremlin watching the door back of Fischer's desk.

It opened, and Hugo came through. "I have arranged everything to carry out the appearance, *Herr*." He made his report.

"Good!" Kremlin nodded. He was utterly cold. "Now let us get to work, my friend, and see if we can clean up the mess Fischer left on our hands."

"*Recht*," Hugo said.

"Since Boyd would not yield to any threat against himself, it occurs to me he

might not be so obdurate were the threat made against some one else," Kremlin resumed.

"That is possible," Hugo agreed.

"And we have here his wife as well as himself?"

"Ja, Herr."

"It was so, I ordered. And if we were to threaten—not her life or her health, but—"

"Herr—one moment, please!" Wagner dared to interrupt. He turned his glance, not to Kremlin, but to the chair where Paula Harris, white now as death herself, was sitting. "Would it not be permissible for Miss Harris to go to her room at this time? The events of the past few moments have surely been more or less trying for a woman, and what we are going to discuss can hardly sound pleasant to her ears."

Kremlin assented with a nod. "*Recht*, Hugo. She can go. And on your way up, Miss Harris, be kind enough to send in a guard." He resumed his conversation where he had left it off. "We'll have Boyd and the woman down here, and—"

Paula Harris rose. She did it with an effort. Surely something was wrong. Surely it was eleven o'clock. And nothing had happened except that Fischer had died and that Kremlin sat there, calmly discussing an added horror with Wagner in his bloodless, soulless way; nothing but that she was ordered from the room, ordered to send in a guard, who, in turn, would be ordered to bring Boyd and Dorothy down to this room to face this human fiend—this human monster!

And Clement Boyd would speak. What else could he do? If he were a true man, what else could he do in the alternative which would be held before him. What man could do anything else than speak to save a woman from that ultimate sacrifice Kremlin proposed. And if he loved her as well. Yes, surely Boyd would speak—unless—unless—

And then, having risen, she paused, while every nerve, every muscle in her body, grew tense. Her eyes went swiftly wide. Her hands jerked up and fell, clutching on her breast, and for the second time that night she screamed.

Like a belated echo of that sound in which Fischer's life went out, from somewhere outside the house, there had come the vicious stab of a shot.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRIPLE CROSS.

A CRY came out of the night—a man's cry, hoarse and choked. It burst out briefly, rose through a crescendo of agony, broke off, and died.

Bang! Some one very close to the house had fired.

His shot was answered by two others, cracking out almost together as though, perhaps, aimed at the flash of his weapon.

Paula turned her widened glance toward Kremlin, still with her hands at her breast.

The man had risen. As she glimpsed him his hand darted into the pocket of his coat, in search of that weapon he had given Hugo to lay beside Fischer's body. He did not find it, and whirled to where Hugo stood.

"Give me your gun, Wagner." His voice snapped out demand.

And quite to Paula's surprise Hugo shook his head. "I'd advise you to yield without putting up a fight," he returned.

"Yield?" Kremlin roared. "Yield? *Herr Gott*, give me that gun!" He took a step in the other man's direction.

And Hugo retreated one step. "Boyd's friends have apparently come to get him," he went on speaking. "Sit down, Kremlin—and think up a plausible story to explain your presence here."

Crash! The butt of a rifle smashed through the glass of the window. The head and shoulders of a man appeared.

Kremlin spun about at the sound. His face was the face of a trapped brute. His lips were drawn back in a snarl of cornered rage. He lifted an arm and pointed at the empty sash as the one who had broken it thrust in his head.

"Shoot—Hugo—shoot!" he bellowed a command.

Paula Harris cowered back, her eyes on the two men, and the third now clambering onto the sill of the window. In a sort of

numb horror she saw Hugo's hand dart into his pocket and emerge, holding a weapon in its grasp. And as in a daze she saw him spin around and level that weapon not at the man in the window but at Kremlin's breast.

"Sit down, Kremlin." She heard his voice.

A sound of footsteps pounding into the outer hall came through the closed door dully, while for one single instant Kremlin stood looking into the muzzle of the gun in Wagner's hand. And then it seemed to Paula that several things happened all at once, each printed indelibly on her brain in vivid flashes of action time could never erase.

With a hoarse, inarticulate roar, Kremlin threw himself on Wagner. He grappled with him, seeking to wrest the gun out of his hand. The two men reeled back and forth in the center of the room.

The man at the window sprang inside and ran toward the struggling figures.

The figures themselves shifted ground. Hugo's foot struck against a chair, he stumbled and went down, with Kremlin on top. There was the sound of a dull explosion, and Wagner writhed free and staggered to his feet. But Kremlin lay oddly still, sprawled out on the floor.

The door into the hall burst open and a half-dozen men crowded into the room to form a huddled group, facing Hugo with the motionless body between them and him, until one, who seemed to be the leader, opened his mouth.

"Hello, Wagner!" he said. "We seem to have been a bit slow."

Hugo nodded. He slipped his automatic back into his pocket. The man from the window knelt and turned Kremlin over. "He's dead, all right!" he announced.

"I didn't mean to kill him," Hugo said all at once. "But he jumped me and the gun went off when we fell."

The leader of the newcomers shrugged. "Well, you should worry, Wagner! He had it coming, and this way he got it without any red tape delay!"

And suddenly Paula Harris seemed to come out of the daze which had held her. She caught her breath sharply.

Then, and then only, the others seemed to observe her where she stood drawn back nearly to one wall, behind them as they had burst through the door and paused.

The leader whirled, stared, and then, sweeping his hat from his head, advanced. "Good evening, miss," he began. "Are you by any chance—"

"I am Celeste Rantoul," she said. "And you—"

"Danby, of the U. S. Service, at your command, *mademoiselle*."

Strange things were whirling in Celeste's brain while she stood there—very—very strange things. They were quite impossible things, only they seemed to have some basis in fact, because this man Danby, of the American Secret Service—Danby, of the nation to which she was accredited—whom she had sent a signal to come down upon this accursed house at eleven this night, had called Hugo by name—had spoken to him as an equal.

For a moment she closed her eyes and opened them again to find nothing changed, and Danby standing there, hat in hand, waiting upon her pleasure. She lifted an arm and pointed to where Wagner was standing, watching with a most peculiar expression on his face—an expression which would have been funny—if it had not been for those wonderful whirling fancies in her brain. "M. Danby, do you know that man?" she said.

"Know him?" Danby seemed staggered by surprise for a single instant. And then he smiled. "Well, rather, Miss Rantoul."

"What's that?" In a stride Hugo was across the room. "Danby—what did you say?"

And Danby eyed him in a rather odd fashion. "Why—I only told Miss Rantoul that I knew you," he said. "I say, Wagner—"

But Wagner shook his head. He looked into the woman's dark, wide eyes. "Paula—" he began.

And now it was time for Celeste to shake her head in turn. It was time for that little hope she had thought dead to stir again and quiver back into life—oh, a wonderful life, no longer weak and failing, but strong—strong—stronger than it had ever been—

strong with the promise of something of which she had never dared to dream. "Not Paula any longer, M. Wagner—but Celeste—Celeste Rantoul," said she.

"Celeste Rantoul," Hugo repeated, and went on: "But I thought—I thought—why—my God, you're French!"

She smiled. The thing lighted her eyes, her face, her whole being, as it seemed. "And you, *monsieur*?"

"American!" Wagner fairly shouted. Celeste read the truth of that in his eyes. Vaguely she wondered that she had never suspected; that her heart had been right and her poor tired brain so wrong. She put out an uncertain hand. "*Monsieur*—it seems we were really allies," she said rather faintly as Hugo took it in his.

"Good Lord!" Danby burst out. "Do you mean you two didn't know each other? That you worked on this together and didn't get wise? Well, I guess that explains the whole thing. See here, Wagner—Miss Rantoul sent us word to raid this joint to-night, just about ten minutes before you filed your report over the wire. We thought things were breaking pretty fast, but all we could do was to get on the job at once."

Yet Hugo hardly heard him save in an indirect way. He was looking once more into the eyes of the girl whose hand he held; looking into them—reading things meant for no other to read; realizing once more, as he had realized that morning when the little bird chirped above his head to its mate, that the world might be a very wonderful place, after all; that Fischer, who had died in this room to-night, had been right when he had said this woman could love him; that a soft, delicate color was stealing into her face, and her lids were beginning to droop before things his own eyes held.

"Celeste." He spoke her new name softly. "Did you really do—that?"

"I—I should like to sit down, *monsieur*," said Celeste Rantoul.

For indeed now she felt that she must sit down, or fall down, at once. Her brain was whirling again, only now it was like some winged thing spinning giddy circles of pure joy against a cloudless sky. Yes,

Celeste's spirit had spread glad wings and was mounting swiftly in glorious spirals of thought.

What had dead men, plots, and counter-plots to do with her now since she knew Hugo for what he was, an agent of the American Secret Service; an ally, as she had said; but, oh, so much more than an ally, as she knew, since she had looked into his eyes as he had looked into hers, and read there something as splendidly full of promise as had been the dawn of that new day when he had stood outside this house of death and torture and lifted his face to the fresh, clean, pink and blue sky, where the gold of a newly rising sun was pinning its wonderful threads of burnished fleece!

Wide-eyed, parted of lip, her round bust swollen with an emotion she strove to hold in check, hardly knowing, she let him lead her to a chair and sank into its support.

"And now if you two have got each other right at last, I'd like to get wise to a few little things myself," Danby was speaking again.

Hugo turned. "All right, Danby," he said in a tone Celeste had never heard him use—the tone of a human man suddenly stripped of all that artificial taint of "kultur" it had so long aped before her ears. "What is it you want to know?"

"Where's Fischer? He didn't get away, did he, m' son?"

Hugo shook his head. "He's probably shaking hands with Kremlin in the ante-room of their joint and patron deity, old man!" He went on and explained.

Danby grunted at the end, went over to the closed door of the little work-room and went in. He turned with a grin.

"Kremlin said there was no reward for them who failed; eh?" he remarked. "Well—he seemed to have been hit by the back fire of that himself." He turned to his men. "Take him in with that dear *Kamerad* of his, will you, boys?"

Then, as the hulk which had been so potent a power so short a time before was lifted and carried an inert mass from the room, he turned to Hugo again:

"Boyd and his wife are all right?"

And Hugo nodded. For a fleeting in-

stant his glance swung aside to Celeste Rantoul. "All right, Danby," he said. "But I fancy we'd best go up-stairs and tell them what all the ruction meant. They're locked up, you know—and we've rather been neglecting their anxiety, to say the least."

Danby nodded. "Stay here," he directed his men.

Hugo addressed Celeste: "Will you come. Dorothy Boyd may need a woman's support again." He smiled.

And Celeste rose and went with him and Danby out of the room and into the hall where other men were guarding the men who had held the hall below stairs and above.

"Which one of you men has the key to Boyd's rooms?" Hugo spoke sharply with some return of the manner he had used with them before to-night; some of that haughty, arrogant bearing of the overman to which they were used.

"I, *Herr*," one of them answered, his face an old mixture of rage and surprise.

"Give it here." Hugo held out his hand.

The German laid the key in his palm. He and Danby and Celeste turned to mount the stairs.

And at the top Hugo pressed the key into the grasp of the girl. "Open the door," he said softly. "Let it be your hand that unlocks their prison and gives them back to life, Celeste."

Her lips quivered. She gave him a wonderful smile. Then she slid the key into the lock and turned it, threw back the door and entered the room.

Boyd and his wife sprang up from the couch where they had been seated together, waiting—with what tense impatience only they themselves could know—since that first shot had rung out in the night, and faced the trio at the door.

And it was to them Celeste spoke with a truly Gallic touch of the dramatic in words and bearing. "*Monsieur* and *madame*, behold then—you are free!"

"Free!" Dorothy cried, while Boyd set his lips to control the leap of his heart which followed the word. "Celeste—you did it! Oh, Clem!" Her two hands gripped his arm. "Clem—dear—Clem!"

"I and Hugo Wagner," said Celeste. "And here is Mr. Danby, of your secret service, to tell you also."

"Wagner?" Boyd exclaimed.

Danby sought to lighten the rather tense situation. One can hardly expect those suddenly reprieved from death or torture, or both, to be wholly normal at once. "Yes, Wagner," he said. "He couldn't tell you, of course, at the time, but—he's one of us, Boyd. He ordered our raid to-night, ten minutes after Miss Rantoul had sent us the very same word."

And suddenly Dorothy spoke again: "And can we go back to the city to-night—now—right away?" Without waiting for an answer she turned to her husband again: "Clem, dear—if we go back now—you—you—maybe you—" Her voice broke off and she stood simply looking into Clement Boyd's eyes with all her woman's soul in her own.

"Sit down, won't you, please!" Wagner broke in. "You can return to your home to-night, of course, Mrs. Boyd. I would advise it, but before you go there is something I want to tell you about the events of to-day. Will you give me a moment, please?"

Dorothy nodded. She drew Boyd back to their former seat on the couch. The others found seats for themselves.

"What I want to say," Hugo resumed, "is simply this: About what Fischer did this morning. It won't be necessary for Mr. Boyd to consult a physician. Not but what Fischer's intentions were sinister enough, but because I switched things about on him a bit—myself."

Danby frowned. Celeste Rantoul's glance leaped swiftly to Hugo's face and found it dully flushed like that of a guilty child who has confessed—because, as she fancied, he had brought their attention all down upon himself. And that was all. For what seemed fully a minute neither Boyd nor the woman beside him gave any sign that they had heard or uttered a sound. Only across the face of the man there passed something impossible either to describe or name.

Then he bowed his head and shut out sight of that wonderful expression with his

hands. And Dorothy cried out—no word, no spoken thing, just a strange, crooning ululation of sound which seemed not to come so much from her lips or her throat as from source behind both, which might be the very center of her life itself, and, turning, clasped her arms about the man and hid her face against his neck, clinging to him—clinging, clinging with an embrace which seemed as though it might never relax; clinging while all the length of her slender figure quivered and shook, though her lips were silent once more, after that single crooning cry.

Celeste Rantoul rose and went softly to the window, turning her back on that scene. She stood there, staring out into the night, and her shoulders shook with tremor after tremor passing through body and limbs.

"What the devil?" Danby, who did not know, began in a startled whisper.

"Later." Hugo rose and went toward that slender, quivering figure by the window. He reached it and stood beside it. He put down a hand and drew the fingers of a cold little hand into his own. "Celeste," he said very, very gently.

"You did that?" she faltered. "You—did—that. And I—I thought—*O, mon Dieu*, but I am ashamed."

"You couldn't know, and I couldn't tell you then, because—oh, Celeste, I, too, thought—well—just about what you did, I guess, that you were—one of them; though now I feel like a fool to think I didn't understand."

A hand fell on his arm. He turned to look into the eyes of Clement Boyd, who had risen and come to him and was standing at his back.

"Wagner," Boyd said slowly, "I—I can't thank you, really, but I want to say this—you've done a great deal more for me, than simply save my life." He put out his hand.

And Wagner wrung it before he went back to his chair and sat down. "You see," he began, speaking again as though nothing at all had happened; "it wasn't any trick at all to spike Fischer's guns. He sent me for that stuff, and not being altogether ignorant of his pleasant little methods, I smelled a good-sized rat. So after

I got the package from the Masterman Laboratories, I just chased off to another and switched the tubes in the original container.

"What Fischer really used was a sterile culture media and nothing more. It made you a bit feverish, I suppose, but nothing worse. I couldn't balk at his plans for handling you, of course, since it appears that both Celeste and myself were playing the same game and waiting to get Kremlin here before we pulled off the raid. So I played out the string with Fischer and appeared to lend my hearty aid in all he said and did.

"The real joke of the whole thing is that neither Celeste nor I knew we were working together, and each thought the other what we tried to seem. If I'd known she was one of us really, I could have had her tell you, and saved you a lot of mental unrest. But frankly, Boyd—from what I saw of you this morning, I fancy you aren't the man to consider what I let you suffer as too big a price to pay for what we gained in Kremlin's and Fischer's deaths."

"Dead? You mean they are dead?" Even yet Boyd seemed a trifle dazed.

Hugo smiled. "Oh, yes. The genial doctor and his high, well-born overlord have left the world behind. And thanks to Celeste first, in frisking you of those plans, and your patriotic and very laudable obstinacy thereafter, they died without gain to their side."

Celeste Rantoul gasped. And then she laughed very oddly and very softly. "Hugo—you knew I had them?" she exclaimed.

Wagner grinned. "Of course. So did Fischer for that matter, only you kept him puzzled, and he wasn't able to persuade himself that his knowledge was correct. Kremlin had the answer to-night, too, for a time, as you saw, until I went over and told him I had searched your room. Still"—he shook his head—"girl, you certainly had your nerve to hide them in that chair."

Celeste gasped again. And then she looked Hugo full in the eyes. "You—took—them?" she accused.

And Hugo nodded. "I certainly did. I didn't believe them safe where you had them concealed. Do you remember last

night when you came in here to dinner, and Mrs. Boyd faced you up with having them in your possession? Well, while you folks were talking it over, I used a pass-key on your door, and went over your room. I found them in the place I would have been first to suspect, dug them out and tacked back the cloth in place on the bottom of the chair.

"Then, when you took Mr. Boyd and his wife in to search for themselves, leaving the doors all open between this room and yours, I simply removed myself to another location and hid the plans in what I considered a very much better place. And I listened to all I could hear, of course. I heard enough to convince me you had dared them to search on a bluff and were somewhat surprised to learn you had told the truth in saying you did not have the things."

"And you've got them now?" Danby broke in quickly. "They're safe."

"Well, no," Hugo told him with a smile. "But I think they're safe enough, unless some one has thought to look for them in the place where one would least expect to find them, which I hardly think has occurred."

"And where 'is that place?" Danby inquired in a voice of considerable tension.

Hugo rose. "Come along and I'll show you," he returned, and led the way into the bedroom of Boyd's suite.

Then, while the others watched, he crossed that to the closet, where Celeste had hung Clement Boyd's dress-coat, and took it out. Holding it by the collar he thrust a hand inside the left breast, fumbled with his fingers for an instant, and drew out a small, securely wrapped package, sealed with bosses of red wax!

Boyd started forward from his station near the door. "That was in my pocket!" he burst forth. "You mean you hid it there?—that it's been hanging there since last night?"

"Exactly, Mr. Boyd." Wagner placed the packet in his hands. "You see, Fischer told me about his search of these rooms, and of finding Miss Rantoul unpacking your suit-case and hanging your things away. She had mentioned your having the

plans with you during your wedding. So after I had them, and while you folks were in her room, I simply came down the hall, told the guard I had a message for you from Fischer, entered your room, placed the packet in your pocket and withdrew. I hardly thought any one, not excepting yourself, would think of looking for them in the pocket of this coat." He turned and laid the garment on the bed.

"By the Lord, Hugo, you were right about it, too," Danby roared. "You hid 'em where one would least expect to find 'em on a bet. And now I've a notion that if Mr. Boyd will let me take charge of the things, we can go down-stairs while Miss Rantoul helps Mrs. Boyd get ready to go home."

Boyd, who had been turning the little packet so unexpectedly produced by Wagner in his hands, passed it over with a sigh of something like relief.

Danby stuffed it away. "I'll see that this gets into the right hands without any more delay," he declared. "Then you can go on to Washington and explain about it, after you catch your breath. And now, any time you're ready, we'll have a car waiting to take you back to town."

He turned to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRUE UNDERSTANDING.

DOROTHY (ROBINSON) BOYD and Clement Boyd were gone. Fischer's body and that of Kremlin with one of Fischer's guards who had died when that first shot had been fired, and several of his living men who had been gathered up, had been loaded into another car and sent after them toward the city as soon as they were away.

Danby had had a talk with Hugo and now, with one of his men, was systematically breaking open Fischer's cabinets and drawers and searching his papers for anything he could find.

Up-stairs, Celeste Rantoul, accredited agent of the French Intelligence Service, was packing her traveling-case, preparatory to leaving the scene of her final success

in striking a crippling blow at the enemies of her own and an allied nation.

And a change had occurred in Celeste. In some subtle way she seemed to have grown younger. There was something almost girlish about her now as she bent over the open case. No longer were her dark eyes tragic beneath the shadow of her soft brown hair. Even her face looked fuller, its weary lines erased. And a faint smile lay on her lips more crimson than they had been throughout the ordeal of the past two days, seemingly better charged with the red tide of her life, flowing with a quicker flood, to work this regenerating change in every cell of the woman, since that little cold, dead hope had stirred again under the spell of true understanding in her breast.

Hugo was an American for all his German name. They were allies as she had said herself. Allies!—Ah, what a wonderful ally she could be to him, if the future should bring the chance. The light of the thought lay deep in her eyes as she worked. An ally, such as only one woman can be to any man; an ally, a companion, a support, a spur to achievement if she be the right woman. A wife, a mother through their allied life perhaps if motherhood should come to her through him. Ah, yes, hope was alive again—alive and thrilling through Celeste Rantoul; and she was all woman as she worked at packing her case.

Hugo, too, was throwing his belongings into a case. And there was purpose in his act. He, too, was going back to the city when Danby was ready to leave. But first he meant to have a word with Celeste.

Celeste. What a woman she was! His eyes flashed as he flung his garments inside the pigskin bag with little regard to order in his haste. He knew she was there in that room next door. Celeste, to whom, despite all else his manhood had cried out through weeks and months, even while he had thought her an enemy of his nation and raged in inward fury at the thought. Celeste, whom Fischer had said cared; whose eyes had told him that she did care to-night; Celeste, who had puzzled him so greatly by her actions, and would puzzle him again in years to come as a woman

must ever puzzle a man, but—Wagner laughed and snapped shut his bag—that was all right.

He took up the bag and opened his door, stepped into the hall and closed the door behind him. And he paused.

Because the door next to his had opened also, and Celeste appeared. She also had a suit-case in her hand.

Without a word Wagner reached out and took it, and with the girl close behind him he led the way down-stairs and outside to the top of the steps of Fischer's house, and set both bags down. He straightened and turned.

Inside the lighted windows of Fischer's room, Danby was still hunting papers through Fischer's cabinets and desk. But Hugo Wagner turned to begin the search for something greater than that; for the greatest thing in the world in which he lived—for love.

And he began that search in the deep, dark, lifted pools of a woman's eyes. Into his own expression crept some of that same wistful quality the woman had noted that morning when he cried out for a fresh faith in man and woman and God. He caught one of her hands and lifted it up and held it.

"Celeste," he said. "Celeste."

They stood alone. Danby's men had drawn off to the cars which had brought them out from town. Save for the blotch of light from the room where Danby still continued his search of written records, there was little to hint of other life than their own. And yet in that great moment Celeste found herself suddenly very stupid.

But great moments are apt to be very simple. Hugo laughed, not loudly, but very, very softly.

"Celeste—I love you. Oh, girl, dear girl, I want you for my own."

And now once more Celeste Rantoul's spirit was spreading its wings and mounting in joyous spirals, as a lark may rise to the sun, with a song of hope in its throat. And some irresistible thing seemed sweeping her toward this light-haired, blue-eyed man who was waiting for her answer to his question; the question she had once prayed he would never ask; the question she had told Dorothy Boyd she would answer in so different

a fashion from what she felt sure she was going to answer it now.

And yet without knowing that she did it in any physical sense she swayed toward him on her feet, and found herself suddenly against him inside the sweep of his arms, conscious of the strong, sure pulse of his heart striking blow after blow through the flash of her own soft breast.

"You want—me?" she asked, hardly above a whisper. "You want me—after what I did?"

"After what you did? And what did you do, Celeste?" she heard his question.

"I—I ordered this raid to-night, thinking you were a German agent; thinking you would be taken with the rest. I—I thought for a time I couldn't do it; that I couldn't bear it; and then when Fischer did what I thought he had this morning, and you yourself told me what Kremlin would probably suggest, what he did suggest—I—I couldn't do anything else. And—Hugo—oh, Hugo—I hated myself because—because—" Celeste broke off.

But Hugo understood. He read his answer into what she had said. "You hated yourself because you could hesitate to give over a German spy to justice. Oh, my dear, my dear. Don't you see I couldn't love you the way I do if you hadn't done it, no matter how much I might love you even if you had not—as I did all those weary weeks when I thought you were just what you thought me to be—and fought out the same fight—and reached the same hard decision as you. Celeste, nobody knows how hard that decision was to reach. I loved you—as I had never thought I could love before; I loved you in spite of what I believed you to be; and yet—girl—I ordered that raid to-night, before I knew the name I'm calling you by now. We reached the same decision, each for himself, Celeste. Each of us decided—"

"To kill the thing he loved," said the girl in his arms.

"Eh?" Wagner looked into her eyes.

"That's the way I felt about it," she went on. "That's what I made up my mind to do, because—like you—I couldn't do anything else. Oh, Hugo, you wouldn't

have been the man you are if you could have failed of your duty to your country just for a woman's love; if you could have let another woman—a little new-made bride—go undefended to that defilement Kremlin meant to be her fate. So don't you see that by deciding as you did, you proved to me how true you could be to a trust?"

For a time the man said nothing. A little breeze stirred about them. It lifted the scent of the woman's hair into his nostrils like some subtle incense of life.

"Don't you see," he spoke again for no other ear than hers, "that your words apply to your own act as well as mine; that you have shown me a woman's fidelity to duty, to honor, to a great trust, just as you say, I have shown a man's fidelity to you, Celeste?"

Her hand crept up and lay upon his arm. "Hugo—you mean—that?"

"That our decision to give up one another brought us together really in the end, as nothing else could have done, showed each the other's spirit; gave us a perfect faith. Celeste—will you give me—yourself?"

And suddenly, quite like her buoyant spirit, Celeste Rantoul lifted herself quite on the tips of her toes, and yielded him her mouth.

"But—my Hugo, it was so droll," she said some moments after, "when you produced those plans. I was nearly mad when I found them gone and I could not think how they had been taken, and I never suspected, not once, until to-night, when you took them out of the most unexpected place."

Hugo Wagner laughed, a deep little chuckle in his throat. "Plans for war secrets are not the only things one may at times find in unexpected places," he declared. "Right now I can think of at least *one* other thing which can sometimes be found where one would least expect. Do you know what it is, dear heart?"

"What?" The girl beside him lifted her eyes. They were the eyes of the Eternal Woman in the soft, warm dusk of the night. "What, Hugo?"

"Happiness," Wagner said.

My Friend the Murderer,



by

Kenneth
MacNichol

THERE was a time when I was honored by the friendship of a real Governor, duly elected by the people of a great Eastern State. He was a good fellow, although somewhat bumptious on display. Since, in the nature of his business he could not afford more than a single confidant, it was often my privilege to look down into the stokehold and engine-room of government and see the wheels go round. In return I sometimes wrote a speech for him, which he afterward delivered with great declamatory effect, both of us pleased to forget its origin.

Practical politics is a game partaking of the nature of chess compounded with the gentle activities of Bornean head-hunters. But my friend was an honest man, and as Governor was honest as a politician can afford to be. His desire to justify his election on a reform ticket was limited only by the conservatism of a reactionary legislature, and certain preelection promises to the machine which had conveyed him safely to the gubernatorial chair.

In any reform movement there are certain wholly safe activities, and others that are quite unpardonable. Especially wise are those reforms which throw discredit on the defeated party or reduce the expense of State, so long as the reduction is not felt in the capacious pockets of the shadowy

gentlemen who pull the strings and live behind the curtains of the throne. Therefore when my Governor began his now famous reformation of all State institutions, they nodded their heads wisely, and whispered, as it were, "Go to it, Bill!"

My Governor's name was Hiram Henry Sproud; it fitted his personality like a glove. Written in a heavy, decisive hand, not without a touch of delicacy in the flourishes, it looked well appended to documents of state.

Let me now introduce Peter Baldwin, a mere alias, by the way, known to his confrères as Philadelphia Pete; as a ward of the State he wore a striped shirt emblazoned with a number, 8092. At the State Penitentiary he occupied a little crypt that was all his own, and acknowledged no further interest in the activities of men. A few months before while engaged in his usual vocation of borrowing money from a bank without security, he had, unfortunately, encountered opposition.

Strange as it may seem to those whose acquaintance with this art is slight, Philadelphia Pete made it a point of honor not to wear a gun. But, since the village constable was between him and his exit, and a hurried departure was imperative, he hurled a roll of silver at the crouching form,

intending to follow with a center-rush. The man collapsed with a neat depression sunken behind his ear. It was while Pete was engaged in a humanitarian and hopeless effort at resuscitation, half the village piled in on his back. When the constable died three hotly contested trials failed to save him from the impending noose.

So far the account of his career is ordinary. His one claim to distinction lay in his great personal resemblance to my friend, the Governor.

That resemblance was more than ordinary; it was extraordinary, fascinating, unbelievable. Philadelphia Pete was more than the Governor's double; he was a bodily twin cast from the same mold. Dress the Governor in convict's stripes, or the convict in a funereal black coat, and there would be as much difference as exists between two new baseballs. But, of course, this resemblance ceased with outward appearances, for as I have said, the Governor was an honest man.

Too much honesty, however, leads to deplorable indiscretions, and honesty is a habit that grows on one; enough is not a satisfying quantity to the possessor. It was the Governor's honesty that led him to remove Warden Bentley from his comfortable office at the State Penitentiary. With the office was also subtracted the emoluments pertaining thereto, a political crime of the darkest hue. For Bentley controlled, or was said to control, a bale of votes. And this particular reform was highly obnoxious to the string-pulling gentlemen behind the throne.

One of them slipped from behind the curtain of obscurity one afternoon, puffily climbed the steps of the Capitol, and entered the Governor's office like any common man. He was huge, fat, and pendulous of jaw. His purse was as swollen as his hide, and his pride in the political maneuvers which had gained him wealth was at least as distended as his purse.

"How about Bentley?" he asked, without preliminary skirmishing.

"I do not believe he is a fit man for the office," the Governor answered smoothly.

"That's got nothin' to do with it," de-

clared the boss. "You kicked him out, an' you gotta find a way to put 'im back."

"Impossible," asserted the Governor flatly. "His successor has already been appointed."

"Then you gotta find somethin' just as good."

"I am afraid there is nothing I could offer him."

The boss pounded the desk-top with a fleshy fist.

"Then make somethin'—clear somebody out! We ain't been askin' nothin' off o' you; we've given you an open track so far. But Bentley is a pers'nal friend o' mine. He was a good friend o' yours before election. I told him I'd look out for him, an' I did. Now you get funny an' gum up the cards. He goes back, an' you can fix it any way you like!"

Then the boss put on his dignity with his hat, and without further words strode from the office. There were other visits, expostulation, cajolery, threat, and argument, but the governor was a very stubborn man. Bentley never again made connections with the source of governmental revenue.

Far reaching are the effects of windy words. This was the first rift in the governor's fine dream in which he was to make all State institutions self-supporting and win the applause of all constituents.

It was a few days later I visited the State Penitentiary for the first time in the Governor's company. He took along a large supply of good advice to present to the new warden.

"Glad to see you," said the warden cordially when he had entered the roomy office of the administration building beside the steel-barred gates in the concrete wall. "I can't feel that you are quite a stranger, though," addressing the Governor jocosely. "We've had you in the penitentiary before; in fact, you are locked up in the cell house now."

The governor was not without a sense of humor.

"All right," he said. "As long as I don't know it you can keep me there."

"Wait until we make an inspection," the warden promised. "You'll be more surprised than I was when I found you there."

It was in the afternoon we looked in upon the multifarious activities of an entire village enclosed in walls—a monastic community incarcerated not for surplusage of virtue, but for lack of it. Surprising how much the convicts looked like other men! Then the warden sprang his big surprise.

"Now," said he, "we'll look in at the death house; you'll find yourself locked up in cell 16."

I shall never forget the meeting between the Governor and Philadelphia Pete.

The warden called him up to the bars of the roomy cell. Out of the shadows a man arose and stepped forward; it was the Governor himself behind the grated door; the honest Governor clothed in convict stripes.

For a full half-minute the Governor looked at the convict without speaking, his mouth open, amazement, repudiation, unbelief, struggling each to supplant the other on his face.

On his part the convict was no less surprised. It was uncanny, laughable, absurd—yes, and pitiable, too, seeing the same expressions as in a mirror, reflected on the face of Philadelphia Pete.

The Governor could not turn his eyes from him. But he reached out, groping, and caught the warden by the arm. And as he spoke there was something in the tone that obliterated the smile from the warden's face.

"Tell me, Shannon, who—who is this man?"

The warden winced away from the clutching fingers.

"We have him down as Peter Baldwin—Philadelphia Pete. It's just a name—he likely borrowed it."

"I'd like to go inside a minute, please."

The guard in the corridor was sent for keys. We stepped away a little from the door, but could not help overhearing the conversation.

"John," the Governor said; "you know me, John?"

Then the convict's heavier, hoarser voice, not entirely unmixed with concern.

"Aw, forget it, Governor; you heard my name."

"No use, John. I'd known you any-

where." There was pleading in the voice of my friend, the Governor. "For old time's sake—of course you know me, John?"

The convict laughed harshly.

"Fat chance I'd have to know the Governor!"

"There might be something I could do for you?"

"You might hurry 'em up a day or two."

"Is there nothing you'll ask me to do?"

"Look at me an' ask that—I've got mine!"

"John," begged the Governor, and it was the voice of a man playing his last card; "at least you'll let me know where Helen is?"

There was surely a break in the convict's voice, but his words conveyed no tender meaning.

"Aw, go to hell!" said Philadelphia Pete.

And then the Governor came out from the cell. As we passed the grating I saw the convict sitting on his bed, a shadowy formless figure with sunken head resting on his arms.

The Governor returned to the Capitol that afternoon, but I stayed behind to get some depositions that he wanted. In the days that followed I saw a great deal of Philadelphia Pete, though always under the watchful eyes of the guard stationed at the door.

He was interesting, fascinating, a man who lived in two worlds, each entirely separate and distinct. His mental existence was that of a cultured gentleman, but in the world in which he had pursued his calling, he was a roughneck of the purest stamp, and many were the tales he told me of the slinking, creeping life of the underworld. But he was strangely philosophical, and had studied himself as earnestly as he had analyzed the criminal impulses in other men. He was also wise in his recommendation for treatment of social delinquencies. I could not correlate the man with the deeds he had done; outside of prison walls I should have been glad to call him friend.

Meanwhile the Governor was gathering enemies—making quite a collection of them. With each new effort he made, they sprang

up in the night from a skilful sowing of dragon's teeth; malicious slander circulated by shadowy gentlemen to whose methods of reasoning he was not amenable. Each new reform was the signal for a new attack; they saw illicit profits swiftly vanishing, and the possibility that still more would go. For with the Governor the problem that had been simply one of economics grew into a deep seated conviction that the people were being robbed by politicians, and that in the State institutions something might be done for the under dog.

Just what connection existed between this conviction and the mysterious meeting with Philadelphia Pete I was unable to determine, but it soon became apparent that the big fight was going to center about that individual. Without further investigation the Governor had granted a stay of execution, setting up the contention that the jury had been prejudiced; that the crime had not been premeditated, and the extremest penalty should not have been imposed.

The case was a notorious one; the action a new and wonderful weapon in the hands of his opponents. Under skilful press-agent manipulation the State cried aloud for the blood of Philadelphia Pete, and condemned the Governor as an incompetent sentimentalist.

What Pete thought about it all I do not know. But before I left the prison he asked to see me in his cell.

He seemed to be a very nervous man. Only after considerable conversational skirmishing would he speak of the thing that was near his heart.

"You'll see the Governor when you go up-State?"

"Yes," I answered, "I expect to see him soon."

"Tell him, for me, I'm sorry that I told him to go to hell! Say I'm grateful for what he has done."

Then, with an effort, he spoke again, giving me a slip of paper on which he had written an address.

"He'll know what that is," said Philadelphia Pete. "Tell him I left Helen all O. K."

I gave the address to the Governor at the Capitol. I fancied he looked at me a bit

curiously, as though he would discover how much I knew. And then, after a moment's thought, he scribbled a few words on a bit of note-paper, and passed it across the desk to me.

"I would rather not have this go through official channels," he stated. "You'll not mind sending a telegram for me?"

It was a short message addressed to Mrs. John Weston—the destination a little town up-State. He requested that she call on him, and he had signed it simply, "Henry Sproud."

I do not know what happened at that interview, but the Governor introduced me to her later; a little, lovable, cuddly kind of woman, with beautiful eyes a little blurred with tears resting on the Governor gratefully. The Governor whispered to me in an embarrassed aside that for *finesse* would have been no credit to a schoolboy.

"Please get her the best dinner you can buy, and see that she gets on her train all right. If only I wasn't the Governor—"

It was not until we were seated at a table resplendent with silver and snowy napery that her conversation became more than monosyllabic.

"You're a good friend of the Governor's?"

"Considering the limitations of his office."

"He is a very good man, is he not?"

"My dear lady," I responded, "lead me not into interminable discussions. Good is a word of many conjugations. I have found him a most obliging man."

"He is good! He is the best man that ever lived!" In her eyes was a look of certainty, though they still asked painful questions of the future. I was content to let it rest with that, but it was impossible to steer her into the path of light and frivolous conversation.

"The Governor tells me that you know my John?" She hesitated for my assent. "He is a good man, too," she asserted stoutly, "even though he is—where he is. I know he never meant to kill that man—it was all my fault—I wanted so many pretty things. And I never knew what he was doing, until they told me he had been arrested."

Womanlike she glanced deprecatingly at

the somewhat faded traveling suit she wore, and again I saw tear-drops glittering in her eyes.

"Most of the money was honest, anyway. I had my own bank-account he gave me, and even at last he told me every cent was earned. Of course I spent it when the trouble came—the lawyers always wanted a little more. But he'd told me that I mustn't do it—it couldn't make a difference, anyway. He should have known I would, as long as there was a chance."

There was so little I could say to her.

"Do you think the Governor will do anything?"

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed. "He is so good—he wouldn't send for me to dis-appoint me. He's already signed a re-prieve for John. Perhaps I can even get him to sign a commutation—then, oh, if only it was not for life! They get so much time off for good behavior!"

God bless the hopeful hearts of women-kind! Perhaps I am too easygoing, in a way, but, thought I, surely nothing in law or justice or cheap politics should stand between a woman and her true-heart's love! But there was no comfort I could offer her. I knew too well how mechanically the wheels go round in the engine-rooms and stokeholds of the world. But just before I put her on the train, as I thought, I found a cheery word for her.

"Dear lady, please don't worry now too much. The Governor will do what he can, I know. Remember Damocles who took his dinner beneath a hair-hung sword and lived to walk safely to his home!"

I could have cut my tongue out for that last remark.

It would be idle gossip to relate in detail the fight made by the Governor for the life of Philadelphia Pete. But the shadowy gentlemen, getting a mere suspicion of a scent, made the name of that particular convict synonymous for all of the Governor's measures of reform. In the Legislature the battle was most fierce, if we except the heavy artillery of the press. House Bill 408, a pet measure of the Governor's, creating an unbiased Board of Supervisors for State Institutions, was easily defeated. But a bill was passed, tak-

ing away all his personal power of administration. He had granted some paroles and a few pardons, and had signed a stay of execution for all condemned, but his measure abolishing capital punishment met an inglorious end. His enemies retaliated by offering for passage House Bill 415, a measure which entirely abolished his gubernatorial prerogative of pardon or parole. It passed the House and went to the third reading in the Senate.

Such was the status of affairs when I called at his office one afternoon and found a very tired Governor. I had a report to submit which we discussed at length until purple dusk crept through the wide windows, and he rose to switch on the lights. But a moment later he restlessly snapped out all except the shaded reading-lamp above his desk.

"Eyes bother you?" I asked.

"I am tired," he assented nervously. "They have been a little troublesome."

I continued reading the report, to which he paid but scant attention.

"That's enough," he said presently. "We'll have the rest of it to-morrow morning. There's something else I want to talk about."

As though on impulse he opened a wide drawer and tossed a bundle of official documents across the desk. It took only a hasty glance to see that they were commutations with the names of condemned men written in. Beneath the name of "Peter Baldwin" was written "to ten years." They were unsigned.

"You know what your signature on these would mean?"

"To me—or to those men?"

"Well, both."

"It's life for them—"

"And political death for you," I answered for him. "Are you going to go through with this?"

My Governor was very thoughtful.

"I don't believe in the State killing men. You know about House Bill 415?"

"The one that takes away your right to pardon or commute?"

"It passed the Senate this afternoon," he said. "It will become a law without my signature in three days."

"Then," said I, "unless you sign these commutations, I reckon they'll have a hanging party at the pen. Our tender-hearted populace yells for blood!"

The Governor winced.

"There are so many things I could do—without this interference. And what's it for—do you suppose *they* care? It's money they want—and they'd wade through blood to get it—they force me to do things that are unwise!"

"Well?"

The Governor arose and began pacing the floor, three steps forward, three back, three forward, three back—I saw Philadelphia Pete walking in the circumscribed area of his cell.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "I don't know what to do! I can't—how can I let that man hang?"

"Man alive, sit down!" I said to him. "You make me jumpy going on that way. Do it—or don't, and get it off your chest!"

"My boy," he said, "you—you don't understand." But he was a little calmer for all that, and sat down at the desk again.

"Let's have it then—and cut the introduction."

"We're cousins," he blurted out. "His parents and my mother were all dead—even my father who raised us was never sure he could tell us apart. We grew up together and ran away from home together and roamed around together for five years. Then, when my father died, we came back, and we both fell in love with the same girl."

The Governor's tone grew musing, reminiscent. It was no time for interruptions now.

"My father left considerable money to me, and some for John, but we had the name of being wild—I was not to get it until I was twenty-five. Helen liked both of us, but one of us she loved. There was an engagement, but it was settled she was not to set the day until the estate was settled up. And so both of us went away again. We were not so very industrious. We drifted from place to place and saved a little money, but not much. But we were always friends—better friends than men often are. It was a lot of fun when people couldn't tell which was which—half the

time John passed for me and I for him. And it was easy, because we never had secrets from each other. We told each other that marriage would make no difference between us. And then, a few days before I was twenty-five, we started home. Helen had named the day—one of us went with a heavy heart.

"We'd spent most of our money to make a good appearance sending the baggage on ahead. It was only a few hundred miles, and we stole a ride on the railroad to our town, just as a farewell to vagabondage. They'd had a lot of trouble with tramps on that road, and the brakemen—"shacks," we called them—had orders to keep them off the line. We were "ditched" three times in the first hundred miles. Then one night we boarded a long train of box cars and gondolas. There were three trainmen to take care of them. It was fun dodging for a while; dangerous, too, and that added to the fun. We rode that train from engine to caboose and roof to rods.

"There was one big fellow especially, who almost went crazy trying to get us off that train. He herded us away from the train at one stop—threatened to kill us if he caught us again. But as soon as his back was turned we doubled on him, ran up around the engine in the dark, and climbed on the rods on the other side. We rode to the next stop, then got on the roof, found an open ventilator, and dropped into a closed box car half-filled with freight. It was a nice summer night and fairly warm. We took off our coats to spread over us and laid down on a pile of grain sacks to go to sleep."

The Governor's tone had grown impersonal as though describing a picture he had seen somewhere; he was looking down a dim vista of years as at some one once known. But I saw pictured the little woman coming from his office—a fair, lovable cuddly kind of woman who must have been very beautiful. No doubt my friend, the Governor, saw her too.

"There were the two of us, myself and my friend, both young men with the world before them lying down to sleep without trouble of conscience, and youthfully hopeful of each new day to come. And then

the ventilator opened again and the big brakeman dropped down into the car.

"He didn't reach for us—not at once, though we started up for fear of him. But he staggered over to the wide door of the car and tugged it open so the moonlight came in; outside the landscape rushed past like flowing water. Then he came back for us. His voice was thick; there was a smell of whisky on the man. He rubbed his hands together unpleasantly.

"'Thought you was damn funny, didn't you? Thought I didn't see you, you dirty bums? Well—'

"He grabbed at us both together and jerked us to our feet. He tried to fling us both out through that open door. And I was afraid, and struggled and fought back at him, and almost felt myself hurled into the air. We clung to the slats at the side of the car, only a few feet from the door; if we called for help no one could hear.

"I don't know how it happened to this day, but he tried to take us then, one at a time, and one of us wriggled loose—dropped down for the awful fear of falling out and caught the brakeman by the legs, so that he fell backward through the open door. It was all so quick—there was never a sound from him. We heard his body strike the road-bed—that was all. And we looked at each other, panting and scared, and never looked out again. After a little while we closed the door.

"It was a long time we sat there in the dark with our arms around each other. I don't know what we expected, but I kept seeing that dark huddle lying beside the road-bed and the bright moonlight flooding down on it.

"We got off the train before daylight and hid in the woods until night came—then walked five miles into town. And then both of us went to Helen's house and waited for her in the garden. And then, when we were all together there, the one who was responsible for that man's death told Helen that he couldn't marry her—said that he must go away at once, but wouldn't give her any explanation. The wedding day had already been announced. She thought it was all very queer and strange; cried a little, but was too proud to confess

her hurt. So we boys formed a plan—and then the Ishmael went away. It was five years before he came back to the town again. But he was never arrested—they thought the brakeman had fallen from the roof of a car. No one was ever suspected. Nothing could be proved. It was all a terrible accident—as the killing of that constable was accident."

The Governor looked across the desk at me.

"It's penalty enough—punishment enough," he cried, "just to have a murder on your soul!" He dropped his head into his folded arms.

Then I rose and walked over to him.

"It was long ago," I said softly, "and it was your life or his. And so, then, your cousin took your place?"

"No one ever knew the difference," he assented, "except Helen, of course, and she learned to love him after a while. But it was a year before they married. My cousin took my name and I took his; he settled up my father's estate for me, and impoverished himself to send me every cent. Perhaps that is why he became a criminal when luck failed him in the city where they moved. But it is the real Henry Sproud they want to hang there in the penitentiary—the real John Weston who sits here in this chair. It's like asking a man to hang himself!"

I gave him the commutation papers.

"Sign 'em," I said, "and let the blessed opposition howl!"

He wrote his signature in a heavy, decisive hand. It looked well appended to those particular documents of State.

My friend, the Governor, no longer sits in the gubernatorial chair—he was never again elected to that office. Philadelphia Pete, who long since received his last remission for good behavior, has renounced the use of aliases, and is a popular citizen of a Western State. Many of the shadowy gentlemen have passed to a land where power and profits concern them no more. As for my friend, the Governor, an honest man, a majority of honest voters in the State sent him to Washington to represent them there. It was felt that his honesty should have more room to grow.

The Joyous Trouble-Maker

by Jackson Gregory

Author of "Ladyfingers," "Wolf Breed," "The Short Cut," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MASK IS DROPPED.

BEATRICE CORLISS had mentioned to Embry a certain Mrs. Denham because the widow had an undoubted charm for men-folk, because she had evinced interest in Mr. Embry "of whom she had heard delightful things," and finally because Beatrice would have been glad if Mrs. Denham or another could divert Embry's growing attentions. And now Mrs. Denham, petite, dark, and clever, became an aid to events going forward.

She was not a friend of Beatrice, just a guest. Having decided to be among the score or so of fortunates accepting the Corliss hospitality for a fortnight she had, in her usual competent manner, accomplished her desire. Knowing the right people it was simplicity itself to such an one as the petite, dark, and clever Mrs. Denham. A letter to Beatrice from an Eastern acquaintance, the competent campaigning of Mrs. Denham, and here she was among the brightest and most enthusiastic of the pleasure seekers at Thunder River Ranch.

"I am fairly consumed with an abiding inner joy!" she exclaimed to her hostess. "I feel like a child again; I want to see the wheels go round. I am simply mad to meet the fascinating Mr. Embry; and I shall never rest in peace until I have met that horrid Mr. Steele, too, and with my

own eyes peeped in on the wickedness of his Boom Town."

And here one day she appeared in Boom Town escorted by a dangling young man whom she had annexed to serve her purpose for the day. She manifested a very pretty interest in everything and anything, from the straggling shacks to the new mining shaft. She went here and there chattering and exclaiming, scattering adjectives in her train like a continuous volley of gay colored, pygmy fireworks. Having after an hour's wanderings glimpsed Steele she descended upon him, dragging her dangling young man after her.

"Isn't he splendid!" she cried enthusiastically, her eyes brightening to such details as his big bulk, rough garb, great boots mud-bespattered. Her young man grunted through the corner of his mouth not occupied with the cigarette which droopily emulated himself.

"I know you'll think I'm simply disgraceful, Mr. Steele," was her direct way of greeting his mild astonishment. He had removed his hat and accepted her little gloved hand wonderingly, having no alternative. "As no doubt I am. But I just had to tell you how wonderful your work here is; how I have never seen anything that thrilled me so. And out here, in the bigness of the eternal forests, one can for a little forget the odious conventions, can she not? I am Mrs. Denham, one of Beatrice

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Corliss's friends, you know. She has told me all about you."

And she shook her head at him merrily.

While Steele was still staring down into her bright upturned face wondering what the deuce had brought her, she brought her escort nearer with a nod and introduced him. Ensued a quarter of an hour of lively chatter, young Mr. Foxhall fidgeting, Steele inwardly contrasting the real thing in womankind with this artificial product, Mrs. Denham releasing further fireworks of superlatives. It was "How lovely!" here and "So interesting!" there with countless *grands* and *magnificents* and *really-too-wonderfuls* like seasonings scattered copiously from the pepper-box of her mind.

But never lacking in discernment was Mrs. Denham. She read in Steele's eyes that he was about to excuse himself, claiming the necessity of his presence elsewhere, and forestalled him by saying in her lively manner:

"Really, Mr. Foxhall, we must be going. If you will bring the horses?"

Mr. Foxhall departed gladly upon his errand and Mrs. Denham turning the battery of her smile upon Steele said pleasantly:

"Oh, I've heard all about you, Mr. Steele. You can guess who has been talking to me, can't you? Oh, you've been perfectly horrible to poor, dear Beatrice, but . . ."

Had one only Mrs. Denham's words by which to judge her he well might underestimate her. Not so, had he eyes to see such a look as now was directed upon Steele. Only a very clever woman can in one flash of her eyes say in wordless eloquence. "But doesn't a woman like sometimes for a man to be horrid to her? Haven't you succeeded in interesting her already as no other man could do?" And surely some such thing had she managed to convey to Steele.

"Dear me," she ran on, "I have clattered away like I don't know what sort of a creature. So glad to have met you, Mr. Steele. I don't suppose that you'll be coming to the ball to-morrow night, will you? At the Corliss home, you know. Isn't Bea-

trice a dear to make it a mask affair, and just because I have told her how I adore a *bal masque*! Shall I save you a dance, Mr. Steele? Good-by, for I am going now. Ted has the horses ready."

A puzzled and at last interested Bill Steele stared after her waving departure, still wondering. Had Beatrice actually told this flighty little creature all about him? It was difficult to think of Beatrice speaking intimately with this sort of a woman, and yet what did he know of her friends? Then why in the name of all that was baffling had Mrs. Denham sought him out to tell him of the ball and suggest that he come? Had she meant to give the impression which she did give, the absolutely absurd impression that Beatrice was cognizant of her errand and was willing that he come? But any explanation defied him; he had to choose between the two unanswerable problems: Had Mrs. Denham, who had never so much as seen him until now, wanted him to attend the ball, or had she acted as Beatrice's emissary?

Had he carried the matter to Sylvia Caruthers or to Rose Hurley either of them might have suggested something. But Bill Steele merely shoved considerations aside and determined upon the instant that whether Beatrice was willing to see him or not he would go. Otherwise he would not have been Bill Steele.

To-night Beatrice Corliss's whole being was pervaded by a pleasurable excitement. When had music had the strong pulse which it had to-night, when had life surged through her so eagerly, so expectantly? After the fourth dance she slipped away from the laughing, jesting couples, gathered up her fluffy skirts and ran breathless to her room. Her maid looked at her curiously.

"Quick!" commanded the girl. "Change me, Della! Hurry, hurry!"

She had jerked off the tiny black mask in which until dancing began she had taken scant interest, her eyes dancing, her cheeks warmly flushed. While Della sought further and more definite instructions, Beatrice kicked off her slippers and began slipping out of her gown.

"Can't you understand?" she asked of the mystified serving-girl. "You see they all knew who I was; now I am going to change and slip back in another costume and—"

But what else she planned was not for the maid's ears.

"But what gown, Miss Corliss?"

Since no fingers or feet were swift enough for her save her own Beatrice ran to a big closet, threw back the lid of an old trunk, whisked out the tray, and in a moment was back before Della carrying the costume she meant to change to. And when, with Della's aid, she had dressed again here was a new mystery to slip back into the crowd of dancers. A pair of very bright eyes just guessed through very tiny slits of her mask, a slender body in ornamental buckskin blouse and short skirt, hands incased in gauntlets, feet and legs in high-heeled buckskin boots.

"Now, they won't know me for a little while," she told the very attractive and alluring reflection in her pier glass. "And before they guess right I'll know!"

Della had caught her enthusiasm.

"If there was just somebody to wear the gown and things you just took off," she suggested.

Beatrice at the door, whirled and came back, laughing softly.

"Hurry, Della!" she commanded. "Just play the part for five minutes and I'll give you the whole outfit!"

And, to the last hastily adjusted flounce of lace, it was the mistress who dressed the maid, much to Della's unspeakable confusion and to Beatrice's delighted satisfaction.

"A scarf over your head, Della—your hair is just a little too dark—about your face, too, a bit—like that—you mustn't talk, you know—that's perfect—Gloves, Della. You must have gloves—"

At last it was done and despite her protestation and growing embarrassment, Della the maid, went slowly down the long hallway, her color very high, her heart beating like mad. And Beatrice, watching and then following, to enter the rooms where they were dancing as unostentatiously as possible, carried a heart scarcely less fluttering.

"And now we'll see what you'll do, Mr. Smarty Bill Steele!" she told herself expectantly when at last Della had entered and she herself had again mingled with the couples forming for the new dance. "As if you could masquerade any more successfully at a dance like this than an big old elephant at a butterfly party."

Standing by the open windows, framed against the black of the outer night was a big man in conventional evening dress with a home-made mask completely hiding his face and allowing merely the piercing look of his watchful eyes through small holes. While Beatrice watched him he was watching Della. It was very obvious that he was watching Della, that he had eyes for no one else. A gauntleted hand went swiftly to Beatrice's lips to hide the laughter that curved them.

"Oh, I know you, Mr. Impudent Bill Steele!" she whispered to herself. "I'd know you anywhere. And you had the assurance to come like this into my house!"

Properly she should be angry. But she knew that she wasn't. She was just delighted, delighted that he had come, that she had recognized him at the instant that he arrived, that now she could watch him dance with Della. And presently, when he discovered who Della was, why then Beatrice would still be watching and would no longer hold back her laughter. And then, if he did not go, she would have him thrust out of doors—

A knot of half a dozen men had formed swiftly about the embarrassed Della. Beatrice saw how her hands were everywhere at once, trying to hide her hair, her cheek, her hands themselves. Men were asking her to dance, were begging her—

Through the knot of men came Bill Steele suddenly, saying bluntly, "Beg pardon," as he shoved them aside. Then Bill Steele's arm was about Della, he had drawn her toward him, swinging her nearly off her paralyzed feet to the strain of the music, and the two, while Beatrice smiled her amusement after them, swung out among the whirling couples.

Close to where Beatrice stood drawn back against the wall was another man whom she thought that she recognized; it

was Joe Embry and Embry's eyes had gone swiftly and frowningly she thought after Steele and Della. Beatrice could have clapped her hands. If only Della could play the part!

"Hello, Miriam, my dear," said a whispered voice in her ear. "As if any one wouldn't know you!"

It was the little widow, Mrs. Denham, tricked out girlishly but not to be mistaken. Beatrice let her pass without telling her that she was not Miriam Dodge and would have paid no more attention to her had not Mrs. Denham gone straight to where Embry stood. She had startled him by coming up behind him. Without withdrawing his look from Steele and Della he returned her greeting. Beatrice promptly lost interest in the two of them, hoping in passing that they might come to be interested in each other, and then watching Steele.

A partnerless man bore down upon her then and rather than risk discovery through arguing the point with him she accepted his arm and danced. But even so she had no difficulty in keeping Steele's tall form in view.

As the music ceased the gay, chatting couples parted or passed into the refreshment room or out into the cool dusk to stroll up and down by the windows. Beatrice, excusing herself hastily, slipped through the crowd and came close behind Steele and Della, intent upon the shamelessness of eavesdropping. She saw that Steele was bearing the confused Della onward toward the door, guessed that he was going to insist upon a word outside, the two alone. They came to the door—and suddenly Steele stopped.

"A thousand thanks for the dance, unknown lady," he said quietly.

Then he turned, seeming to have forgotten his recent partner and Della fled. His eyes went this way and that, back and forth eagerly. Then they came to rest upon the buckskin-clad mountain girl just a few paces away. With big, quick strides, and before she could stir, he had come to her side.

"You fooled me for a minute, you little rascal," he laughed at her. "And now, to

pay for it, come with me for a moment or two out into the court. I want to talk to you."

"Della spoiled it all by talking!" Beatrice was crying within her heart. And to him, coolly spoken: "Are you sure that you know to whom you are talking now?"

"To the queen," he said gently, and she marked in his voice a tone which she had never before heard there, a note which despite her set the old, odd thrill in her pulses. "The queen of the world, so far as I am concerned. Will you come—please?"

For an instant she wanted to do as Della had done and flee without further ado. In that instant she turned her eyes from him, seeking an open avenue, and saw across the room that Mrs. Denham and Joe Embry were still together, that Mrs. Denham's hand was eager on Embry's arm, that both were looking toward her and Bill Steele.

"I'll be as humble as a dog," pleaded Steele and she saw now that his eyes, too, seemed unusually grave. "Won't you come? Just for a minute and let me tell you—"

"No," she said icily then. "And let me tell you something which I allude to only because I don't fancy a scene here: If you remain in my house another five minutes I'll be forced to call the servants and have you thrown out. Do you understand, Mr. Steele?"

From the light in his eyes now she could imagine the flush in his cheeks.

"And do you understand, Miss Corliss," and she guessed that under his improvised mask the muscle had hardened at the base of his jaw, "that there'd be quite a little scene if your lackeys started anything before I've had a chance to talk with you? I have been a thousand years trying to see you and now—"

He had slipped his arm suddenly through hers, drawing her toward him. She sought to draw back and could not. The cry forming on her lips she stilled. She ceased to throw her small strength into a futile scale against his. A man and woman passing looked at them and laughed and passed on, supposing that this was a bit of play on the part of two of the merry-making throng.

In another instant Beatrice and Steele were outside.

For a dozen steps she went quietly at his side; she was thinking, and the thought left her wondering, how she would have shuddered if it had been Joe Embry who had drawn her thus. Then, suddenly she wrenched away and stood erect, her eyes cool and meant to be contemptuous as they met his.

"I hope that you enjoyed your dance with my maid," she said.

"She fooled me a minute," he answered gravely. "Then I guessed what you had done. I knew almost from the first that it wasn't you I held in my arms; I could tell if I were blind. Then I noticed her throat. Nobody in the world has a throat like yours or eyes like yours or your carriage or your—your perfection."

"Is this Mr. Steele?" mocked Beatrice. "Since when has he known how to be less than boorishly impudent? Where did he learn to say things like these you are saying?"

"I have been something of a fool," he returned. "Admittedly. I have teased you a good deal, Miss Corliss, and I don't wonder that you have made up your mind to detest me. But you've got to give me the chance to square myself. I—my God, how I love you! Can't you tell? Don't you know?"

For a little they were very silent standing in the gloom among the shrubbery. From here and there in the darkness, from the pavilion set at the edge of the little fall of cliff, came laughter and gay voices. From behind them, through open doors and windows, came cries in tune with the evening, telling of banter and much mirth over the matter disguises at which men made guesses. But Beatrice and Bill Steele were very still. She had noted, and the discovery had set her heart to leaping, that his voice had grown suddenly gruff and that it shook to the words, little, time-worn words, which he had said.

But Beatrice's voice when she answered was as steady as even she could have wished it.

"Is this meant as further insult, Mr. Steele?" she demanded coldly.

"You know better than that," he cried passionately. "Never is there insult in a decent man offering his love to a woman, no matter who or what she is. I loved you that first day, and wouldn't let myself know. I loved you that day when you came to me in the woods, and would not let you know. Now, I don't care if the whole world knows. I love you, Beatrice Corliss, as I did not know a man could love a woman. Oh, I am clumsy as a fool at telling you, and you may laugh all you please about the manner of it. But of my love itself you must not laugh, for it is the one thing about me that is as good, and fine as even you are!"

In a moment he was going to sweep her up into his arms, to crush her tight to him—she knew it, sensed it, grew frightened at it. That was what was in his heart, in his eyes, ringing in his voice. And suddenly she knew—that she would be glad—

She drew back from him slowly, her hands rising before her, tight clasped at her breast.

"Long ago you understood how to make me hate you," she told him quickly. "Now do you wish me to despise you, too?"

"You won't. No true woman despises a man just because he loves her."

"Have things gone so badly lately," said Beatrice, aiming to hurt, to extract payment for all that he had made her experience, "that you seek to marry money, Mr. Steele?"

"Miss Corliss," he cried out, "you shouldn't say that—you can't mean a thing like that—" And then suddenly, all without warning, here was the same joyous Bill Steele she knew, his laughter booming out most disconcertingly at her. "You're just trying to make me mad, are you, Trixie girl! Look out if you do! Do you know," and he took a quick step toward her, "one of these fine days I think I'll just pick you up and run away with you and make you love me!"

And now, that she did not expect it, his arms were thrown about her, she was drawn close to him, he had lifted her face with a big hand under her struggling chin and had kissed her.

"Brute!" she cried pantingly. "Brute!"

He let her go, his arms relaxing slowly, dropping to his sides.

"Forgive me," he said gently. "I couldn't help it, Beatrice. I—I'd do it again if you looked like that at me."

Her lips were quivering, her body trembled. Speechless she stood looking at him with wide eyes. Then, not trusting her voice, she turned back toward the house.

She was glad when she saw Joe Embry standing in the doorway.

"Mr. Embry," she called quickly. "Will you come here, please?"

Steele, standing where he was, his pulses hammering, watched her and Joe Embry pass down the long veranda together.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE QUEEN IS GONE!

UNDER the circumstances there could have been nothing more natural than Beatrice's turning to Embry, knowing that Steele's eyes were upon her. And yet, wishing to anger him, she could little understand how her act was to bring fulfilment to her desire far beyond her expectation. The very word, angry, became pale and insufficient; in thoroughgoing Anglo-Saxon way and phrase, she made him mad.

Mad, with the yearning to seize her away from Embry, to hold her back from the contamination of the man's very presence, once and for all to wipe the man he hated from her path. That Embry had been the cause of Hurley's and Turk's injuries, that he had fired Indian City through his agents, that he had in the same manner brutally beaten Wendall and robbed him in Selby Flat, of all this Bill Steele was very sure. And yet for a little he held himself in check and watched Embry and Beatrice pass down through the checkerboard of light and shadow on the long veranda until they disappeared at the far corner of the house.

For he knew, even with the rush of hot blood along his arteries, that that man who hopes to handle a difficult situation must first have himself in hand. What things might he cry out now to regret afterward if he followed where his heart went?

"The night is young," he told himself, striving for utter calm. "Unless Embry urges her to seek to have me thrown out bodily I'd better go slow for a little."

In order to "go slow" he withdrew through the shrubbery, found a bench set apart in the shadows, sat down and filled his pipe. With the first puff of smoke his brows relaxed a bit; soon he was smiling grimly.

"She doesn't care for him," he assured himself. "Being what she is, with him what he is, she couldn't. She just couldn't."

But could she care for such as Bill Steele? There was the rub and his smile was gone as completely and with as little trace left behind it as the smoke rising from the glowing bowl of his pipe.

What next? Should he again enter the ballroom, seeking her out? Unless he meant to go with no further word, that was what he must do; for, obviously, Beatrice would not come out to him. That matter then was settled with no great consideration; come what might of it, he'd go back and—

"Get my face slapped, most likely!" he grunted. "Serve me good and right."

For he was thinking of his lips upon the lips of Beatrice Corliss, of Beatrice Corliss in his arms.

Fifteen minutes later Steele knocked out his pipe and went to the veranda, standing at the side of the door looking in on the dancers. With eyes only for the trim little figure of the buckskin-clad girl he sought her everywhere, found her nowhere. Nor Embry. The two were loitering an unconscionably long time outside.

As the minutes passed, five, ten, fifteen, and neither Beatrice nor Embry came back to the call of the music's invitation, he shifted uneasily and impatiently where he stood, turning with eager expectation at every step on the veranda behind him, at every laughing voice out in the open court. Twenty minutes—and he swung about with a little grunt and went to look for them.

But, apart from the house, it was very dark upon the mountainside. They might be out in the little pavilion, anywhere in the gardens, even in the higher pavilion at

the rear and above the house. From one spot to another he went, seeking them. Many a whispering couple wondered at the big silent man who bore down upon a quiet tête-à-tête, stooped toward them, went on. And nowhere did he find Beatrice or Joe Embry.

He had been so very sure that she could not care for this man; then why was she alone with him so long? In spite of him he began to picture a tender intimacy between them, even visualized Beatrice in Embry's arms. At the thought, which he sought to banish abruptly, he hurried on, looking for them.

By now they must have returned to the house. He hurried back, into the rooms where the dance was in full swing, into the refreshment room, into the library where maskers sat and chatted and smoked. But nowhere did he see either of them.

The remainder of that night was as near hell for Bill Steele as any night he could remember. He would not go without again seeing Beatrice; to that he was stubbornly determined. And yet, since there are times when man's will is shoved aside and set at naught by passing events, he was not to see her.

Until after midnight the dance went gaily on. Staring moodily at the dancers, guessing the identities of none of them save that of a negligible and insignificant little widow who bored him, he shaped and discarded a score of explanations of Beatrice's absence. He would wait until the end, when the unmasking came—

And then, at last, it was the negligible and insignificant little widow who bored him who announced that there was to be no unmasking! Just to make this dance different from others, she cried out gaily in the last lull before the good night waltz; just so that to-morrow there might be those who wondered if they had blundered—

Many acclaimed the suggestion with clapping hands. Steele's greeting to it was a disgusted "Damn!" Was this some more of Beatrice's work? Had she told the exasperating Mrs. Denham what to say? Had she again changed her costume, coming back long ago, dancing with the rest, laughing behind a new mask at Steele's idiocy? And

Embry, had she taken him in with her on her stroke of retaliation, had he, too, simply changed and come back to the others?

For an instant he wondered; then he knew. Beatrice could not hide herself from him like this. He would know her in any garb. And he'd know Joe Embry, too.

The dance was over. Couples strolled, loitered, said lingering or sleepy good nights and disappeared going to their rooms. And Steele knew, as well as he knew anything in the world, that Beatrice had not come back.

Maybe she had slipped in at the rear and gone quietly to her own room? Yes, maybe. But he did not believe it. It was not like Beatrice; she was not the one to run away like that. He began to be uneasy, to fear for her. She had been last with Embry, and Embry of all men in the world he distrusted the most. And where was Embry?

He, too, might have gone home. But where was the sense of it all?

The servants were putting out the lights. Bradford came and went in his quiet way, seeing that doors were closed and locked. The big house was slowly surrendering to the utter blackness of the night. Only here and there were thin lines of light about the edges of drawn window shades where tired guests was hastening to bed. Steele turned and went slowly for his horse. Obviously there was no need, no reason in his lingering here longer.

His heart was troubled with vague dread for Beatrice. As he rode toward his cabin at the Goblet he turned over and over in his thoughts the many explanations which had offered themselves. In turn each one was abandoned as unconvincing and insufficient. And, with every yard flung behind him, his fear for Beatrice grew. He told himself that he was suddenly grown fanciful, that in sober truth his paraphrase of the other day had been truer than he knew, that his love was making a coward of him. But for all that his anxiety was not dispelled.

Suddenly when some two or three miles from the ranch house he jerked in his horse with a sharp exclamation, sitting rigid in his saddle. After the brief indecision and mental uncertainty which is the first growth of

dread such as was his, there comes a quickening of the brain, a lightning-like surety of suspicion. Thoughts which dovetailed now and led in perfected order to an inevitable conclusion ticked through his mind. He had come to-night because Mrs. Denham had suggested it to him; she had gone out of her way to speak of the ball; she had pretended at an intimacy with Beatrice which he could not believe in; to-night he had seen her talking with Embry; and finally, it had been Mrs. Denham who in her gayest manner had suggested that there be no unmasking!

Steele swung his horse about with a savage jerk, crying out aloud wrathfully, touched his spurs to the animal's flanks and with reckless disregard of the uneven trail underfoot blotted out by the darkness raced back toward the ranch house. Mrs. Denham knew where Beatrice was; Mrs. Denham had wanted his disappearance to pass unnoticed; and Mrs. Denham was going to tell him everything she knew.

He had left the ranch house being drawn into the embrace of the darkness; he returned to it to find that lights blazed everywhere. Riding at a gallop into the courtyard where he was afoot before his horse had fairly come to a standstill, he was greeted by an obvious atmosphere of alarm. He saw through an open door some two or three women, hastily covered with kimonos drawn loosely about them, all talking excitedly. Men's voices rose above the sharp exclamations of the women, men, also hurriedly dressed and plainly concerned, were to be seen on the verandas, in the yards, and at the doors.

As Steele appeared among them unexpectedly out of the outer darkness, he was greeted by a sharp, wondering cry here, a muttered exclamation there; the women near the door drew back from him, staring curiously.

"Where is Mrs. Denham?" he demanded loudly. He had come straight on and into the room where fully a dozen of Beatrice's guests were grouped and talking rapidly. Then he discovered her across the room, her hair down, but not in the unbecoming confusion he had noted on every hand, her petite figure clothed in a vivid

green kimono. He came on to her swiftly, with eyes for no one else.

"I want to talk with you," he told her, an ominous sternness in voice and eyes alike. "Alone. Come with me into the library."

Mrs. Denham shot him a sharp, half-frightened look, seemed to hesitate, then, as his eyes rested steadily upon her, followed him. When the two were alone in the library, and Steele had shut the door upon the many interested glances which had followed them, he stood frowning down at her angrily.

"Where is Beatrice?" he demanded.

"Oh, dear!" cried Mrs. Denham. "That's what we are all wondering. We—"

"Where is Joe Embry?" he cut in sharply.

"He has gone to look for her. He left word—"

"Tell me as fast as you can get it out just what has happened."

"Mr. Embry was with poor, dear Beatrice in the garden," said Mrs. Denham hastily. "We were all masked—but you know that part, don't you? We didn't miss them. After we'd got to bed Mr. Embry got the ropes off and the gag out of his mouth and gave the alarm. He had been lying out there all that time. Isn't it terrible, Mr. Steele? And Beatrice—"

She broke off with a shudder. Steele's frowning eyes gave no sign that he had been impressed by it.

"Beatrice," continued Mrs. Denham quickly, "was seized by four or five men; Mr. Embry didn't know how many. They carried her off and—"

"Mrs. Denham," said Steele with bright hard anger in his eyes, "don't lie to me! I want to know what this whole crazy play means, understand? And you are going to tell me!"

Mrs. Denham drew back from him, a little flurry of fear in her eyes, and sought to return Steele's look with an addition of defiance.

"I don't know what you mean—"

"You do know. It's a put-up job between you and Joe Embry. You have got her somewhere, why I don't know. But I

am going to know just as fast as you can tell me. Where is Beatrice?"

She shrugged.

"If you know so very much—"

He came swiftly to her, towering above her.

"Tell me!" he commanded. Again she shrugged.

"I know only what Mr. Embry told me. That he was overpowered and bound, Beatrice dragged away. That," she added coolly, "he very much suspected it was your work. That you had done everything else to hurt her."

For the first time in his life Steele knew the burning desire to strike a woman. She was lying to him and he knew it. And yet bluster and threat would get him nowhere with her. He strode across the room, paused, and regarded her long and searchingly.

"You and Embry are very close friends?" he asked, forcing himself at last to speak quietly. "Is that, or—"

"Oh what, Mr. Steele?"

"Oh," he blurted out, "has he paid you for your part?"

"Haven't you insulted me enough?"

"No," came his crisp rejoinder. "I don't think I have. I think that I know the sort you are, Mrs. Denham. If that be an insult, here is an added one: Joe Embry paid you, and for the information you can give me I will pay you twice as much!"

He saw that his second "insult" had been coolly received; that Mrs. Denham's bright eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Eagerly he awaited her answer.

"You are a strange sort of man, Mr. Steele," was what she said.

He made no reply, fixing her with a keen regard. Presently she laughed.

"You asked if Mr. Embry and I were very dear friends? I think that I have never known a man to detest more heartily. You say that you know what sort I am? Let us see. I am a widow, with no thought of marrying again. I like the pretty things of life. Things one has to pay for. Is that what you thought?"

"Go on," he said curtly. "How much did Embry give you?"

Now she was studying him shrewdly.

"If I said ten thousand dollars?"

"I'd make it another twenty thousand!"

"If I said—let me see. Twenty-five thousand?"

"I'd make it fifty thousand! If you can show me the way to find her."

A bright flush was in her cheeks; she came to him and laid a hand which was suddenly unsteady on his arm.

"Write me a check for fifty thousand dollars," she whispered. "Then have a car ready to take me away immediately. And I will tell you where he has taken her. And I'll be glad—glad that you have beaten Joe Embry! He has planned to compromise her so that she will have to marry him—oh, he is fool enough to think that she'd do it! But she wouldn't. We know that, don't we, Mr. Steele?"

"Do we?" he asked coldly.

"We do! And, to give you full value for your check, my big foolish friend, let me whisper something into your ear: Beatrice is head over heels in love with you right now! Now, order a car for me and I'll get dressed and meet you at the back. There'll be no trumpets blaring when I take my departure."

Gathering up her kimono about her she ran out of the room, disappearing through a door opposite the one through which they had entered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT DAWN.

FOR Beatrice Corliss a night of horror, for Joe Embry the supreme endeavor and final treachery. The treachery of a man built upon the treachery of a woman of the Mrs. Denham ilk, a structure which might stand or might totter and fall, as fate willed it.

Beatrice had known what it was to have rude hands upon her, to have a terrified outcry stifled in her throat, to see vague, threatening shapes struggling about her in the darkness where she had gone with Embry, to see Embry go down under those struggling forms, to wonder breathlessly if he had been killed, then to feel herself lift-

ed bodily in a pair of strong arms and flung unceremoniously into a waiting automobile. Only two connected sentences had she heard the whole while: a muttered, "Easy with her, Steele!" when she had been swept clear of the ground; a sharp, "Go ahead!" when she was bundled into the car.

So this again was the work of Bill Steele! That was her first clear thought through the murk of frightened anger. Was the man mad? Were there no limits to his lawless desperation? Did he think that in a day like to-day there was scope for the reckless play which this attack spelled?

In front of her a man sat stooped over his wheel, driving the big car on with growing speed, with eyes only for the road which his lamps retrieved from the dark. At each side of her was another man, an arm run through hers. Had the night not been sufficient to hide their faces from her then the low-drawn hats and the big handkerchiefs tied about their faces foiled her efforts. The three men were as silent as the sleeping world through which they sped.

After her first frantic buffeting with superior force she had grown very quiet; after the first surge of fear had come anger to be followed by cool, calculating thought.

Now, no matter what appearances were or might be, she was suddenly assured of one fact which startled, then thrilled her strangely. This was obviously meant to appear the work of Bill Steele, and she knew that appearances lied! A man had seized her rudely, another had cried, "Easy with her, Steele!" and she knew now that the man holding her then had not been Bill Steele! She had sensed it then, even; now she knew. How does one know things like this? Earlier in the evening Steele himself had been briefly tricked by the masquerading Della—and then he had known. How and why? Because he loved her and there is a sixth sense? How now did she know so well that this was not Steele's work? First, because it was not his way; not headlong, like him, smacking rather of cunning and deceit. And she would have known had it been Steele's arms about her—because she loved him!

While she sat breathing deeply the glorious truth flashed into her soul, a glowing light upon her own self, her own long-hidden heart's desire. She loved Bill Steele, though she had not been willing to admit it, though she had not seen it clearly. She had wanted him to hold her in his arms tonight, she had wanted him to kiss her; for one stinging-sweet second she had closed her eyes blissfully and lived to the uttermost with his lips on hers.

"Bill Steele," she whispered softly. "I love you!"

They had turned toward the east, headed toward Camp Corliss. Were they taking her to Summit City or on beyond? Questions to be asked but not to be answered now. For at last her eyes were blindfolded, and she knew that the car had circled and circled in a meadow and now might be retracing its way or traveling on eastward. And then, with eyes still blindfolded, she was forced to step to the ground, to mount a horse, to ride out where there was but an uneven trail underfoot. She heard the automobile speeding away behind her. And she knew that now at last there was but one man with her. A man who silently took her horse's reins, who rudely forced her hand away from the band about her eyes, who was spurring on at her side through the mountains.

Then came back her fear in resurging waves. What sign would there be left behind that her friends could follow? How far would the brutality of her captor go? Where was the end of it all for Beatrice Corliss?

Mile after mile they went, and no longer could she guess even vaguely where. They rode through brush which whipped at her feet; they made a slow way down many a steep slope; they mounted slowly to other broken lands, they galloped swiftly through open spaces. She grew to feel the first heralds of fatigue; wondered how many hours had already dragged by; yearned as she had never yearned before for the coming of day after this endless night.

And then at last they stopped. The man with her had dismounted, held out his hand to her. With no alternative, but

with a sudden stiffening of rebellious muscles, she slipped from the saddle. Still with bandaged eyes, her captor's hand on her arm, she went forward a half dozen paces. Then there was a rough wooden floor under her and she heard the slam of a door. Now at last she could whip the bandage from her eyes.

She was in a little one-room cabin such as one finds sprinkled through the mountain country. But, so great was the darkness about her, that to know even that she must pass her hands along the walls. She stumbled against a crude table; sought its surface for a possible match and found nothing; passed on; stumbled against a stove; then a bunk against the far wall. There was a small window; she could feel the rectangular opening, but found that it was boarded up securely. She went wearily to the table and sat down upon it, choosing it rather than a bunk of doubtful cleanliness.

She heard the man moving outside for a few minutes. Evidently he was busied with the horses. Then it grew very silent. There was no sound to tell her if he lounged at her door, if even now he was lifting his hand to the latch, if he had gone away.

Dawn came slowly. She had found that neither door nor window permitted hope of escape, and with a long, hopeless sigh settled again upon her table, dragging it to the wall for a back.

"At least," she told herself, "I am nicely dressed for an escape like this. Looks almost premeditated, Beatrice, my dear!"

For the fighting spirit in her had beaten down her fear; she had rested; she had had much time to think; a growing hope had followed her thoughts. A hope which thrilled through her, which made less dark the night shutting her in, which whispered softly of that which Beatrice Corliss knew she desired with her whole heart.

"I believe I could almost go to sleep, now," she whispered. But instead she slipped from the table and began a restless walking up and down, praying for the dawn, praying for certainty. And, to be ready for whatever might come, she sought in the cabin some weapon which might be

required at her hands. For, even with hope of that which she did hope, there came many a long shudder that night. When all that she could find was an old broken ax handle, she took it up and weighed it in her hands—if only Bill Steele could have seen the look in her eyes then—and hid it at the foot of the bunk.

Since no night is so long as one filled with uncertainty; since uncertainty may grow all but unbearable when fed upon utter silence, Beatrice would have welcomed eagerly the least little sound from without. The moving of browsing horses, the wind in the trees, even the step of the man outside. So she was ready to welcome mightily that sound which did come to her, a man's voice shouting, the rattle of pistol shots, shouts and shots mingled, and then the flying thud of shod hoofs.

"Beatrice! Beatrice! Are you all right? Oh, Beatrice!"

At the first sound she had leaped forward, trembling with excitement, at the barred door. With the words she dropped back slowly, her hands twisting before her; it was Embry's voice.

Embry's hands jerked away the heavy bar, threw the door open. It was dawning across the mountains. She could see him outlined in the pale rectangle. In the hand hanging at his side was a revolver. He was breathing heavily.

"So you have come, have you?" she said quietly.

She went back to the bunk and sat down. Her eyes, scarcely to be seen in the gloom, were steady upon him. He came forward eagerly, his hand out to her.

"Beatrice!" he cried. "They have not harmed you? Oh, Beatrice—"

She made no answer, but watched him keenly. He came on to her, his hand still out.

"I followed," he said hurriedly. "Was lucky enough to get my hands on one of the men—they had trouble with their engine, thank God!—made him tell me where you were. What is it, Beatrice? What is it?"

"Liar, Joe Embry!" she told him steadily. "Liar and gambler and crook! And cur and coward!"

He started back as though her hand had slapped his flushed cheek.

"You have played the long chance, Joe Embry," she went on quietly. "You have been forced to it, and, gambler style, have played the long chance. And lost! If you will stand aside I think I will go out."

While the dawn brightened about them, Joe Embry did not stir for a long time; did not move hand or foot. Then at last, slowly, he slipped his revolver into his coat-pocket. His face would have told nothing even had the light been better.

"I don't quite catch your meaning, Miss Corliss," he returned in his usual smooth, expressionless voice. "No doubt the experiences of the night have terribly upset you. Will you seek to be calm and—"

Her cool, contemptuous laughter cut him short.

"You lose, Joe Embry," was all that she said.

"Just what am I losing?" he asked quietly.

"Me! Me and my millions! What you have been playing for since I first met you. And shall I tell you why you lose? Because you are not man enough to win! When, the other night, Bill Steele played the long chance and bucked your own game at Boom Town, he won—because, losing at first, he but played the harder, because if twelve thousand dollars would not have done it, he would have risked twice twelve thousand. Because he had made up his mind to win, and being a man, he won! And you, Joe Embry, just miss that—being a man!"

"Again," he said, though now with the first tremor in his voice, "I don't quite get you."

And again she laughed at him, fearless in her anger and scorn.

"Am I a fool?" she cried passionately. "Fool I have been, but not to the uttermost! Do I hear nothing of what goes forward, and hearing, do I not think and wonder? Do I not know now that it was your money which financed that hideous house in Summit City? That it was you and not Bill Steele who put up those insulting signs? That it was Bill Steele who, before all men and in white rage, tore down your

handiwork in Boom Town? That it has been for your own ends all along that you have urged me on to strife with him? That it was you to-night who dared have me brought here that it might be you who would come bravely to the rescue?"

"You are mistaken," he said sharply.

"I am not mistaken," she flared out at him. "Had Bill Steele wanted to carry me away to-night he would have done it alone, Bill Steele's way, a man's way! No, Mr. Embry, I am not mistaken. You have played your game, played it to the desperate end, and have lost."

He stood in silence, his eyes keen and hard and penetrating. Then he shrugged.

"Have it your way," he said coolly, and now more than ever did she marvel at the man's mastery of himself. "If you like I have played a risky game because I have had to do it. And lost? Not yet, if you please. I have not lost, and, by God, I am not going to lose. We need not waste time in idle talk, need we? When a man plays a desperate game it is usually through no mere preference on his part; he does what he is driven to do. I have got to go through with this; I have got to see that in the end I don't lose out. You seem to know a very great deal; let me tell you something that you don't know. It is believed now that you were brought here forcibly. Here you shall stay—alone with me—all of to-day and to-night and to-morrow and to-morrow night. Then, some of your friends led here as by chance by a certain one of your guests, will find us together. Then, since it was I, and I alone who told the kidnaping story, how is it going to look for you, Beatrice Corliss? What will they say?"

His words had come slowly, clearly and coolly. But swift had been the mounting of blood to her cheeks, swift the blazing fires in her eyes.

"They will understand what I wish them to understand," he continued rather more quickly. "Compromised you will have been already, since they think that Steele has you. Do you wish further compromise, your name and mine food for gossip?"

Readily enough and more than once had

she called Steele "Brute!" Embry's words she heard in dumb, frozen silence.

"You will marry me," he told her, his tone ringing with conviction, "because I love you, because I am the man for you, because you half love me now—and finally, because there is nothing left for you; that or a bandied name."

"I'd choose disgrace, yes, and death before you!" she cried wildly, her face white with passion.

Behind her her hand had closed upon the broken ax handle, her only weapon. In another instant she might have launched herself at him, striking with all of the fierceness of her sex when awakened to utter loathing and terror. And then, at her moment of greatest need, there came to her from without a sound which set her heart to leaping, her pulses bounding.

It was Bill Steele's voice like some glorious trumpet shouting powerfully:

"Coming, Trixie girl! Coming!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"THE WIDE WORLD AND YOU AND I—"

AND yonder, sweeping over the near ridge on a big bay horse, looking to Beatrice's eager eyes like a veritable god of the dawn, came Bill Steele. Almost the first thing she saw was the glint of light upon something in his hand.

Then she saw only the door jerked shut, barred by Embry's quick fingers, Embry himself in front of her, his revolver in his hand, his eyes full of fury.

"I'll kill him!" he snapped viciously, "and swear I came upon him manhandling you—the fool!"

A great rattle of loose stones, the hammering thud of his horse's flying hoofs, and Bill Steele had thrown himself to the ground in front of the door, shouting:

"Open, Embry! Open, I tell you!"

The report of the gun in Embry's hand, the slow smoke curling upward from the barrel, was Embry's answer. Beatrice saw the splinters fly from the door and stood rigid, her breathing stilled.

Again Embry fired, and again and again. Beatrice cried out softly with each shot so

that her voice was like a strange, faint echo to each burst of exploding powder. Steele would be killed—oh, dear God, why hadn't she put her arms about him last night and told him—surely he would be killed now. And he was not even firing back. Because he would be afraid that it might be Beatrice and not Embry that his bullet found!

Embry had slipped fresh cartridges into his gun, was holding his shots now; was asking himself what Beatrice had asked before him; was Steele down already? And then came Steele's answer.

He had drawn back, had gathered all of the power lying in his big bulk, had thrown himself forward at the door. And as he struck the door flew from its hinges as most doors would have done under the impact of his wrath-impelled body, cracked and snapped back against the wall.

But he himself was overbalanced by his own momentum, and as he straightened up Joe Embry had drawn back a step, had lifted his revolver so that the muzzle was not four feet from Steele's head—had fired! And, thanks to a broken ax-handle in two tense white hands, the bullet went ripping into the boards of the floor, the gun itself flew from Embry's grasp.

"Damn you!" cried Embry then. And threw himself upon Steele.

Many a time had Beatrice heard Bill Steele laugh. But never was she to forget the sound of his laugh now. He had seen, had marked Embry's springing forward, and had thrown down his own gun, laughing. She did not know that a man could laugh like that! Laugh for the sheer, pure joy of being able to put out his hands and find with them the man he wanted in them! She did not know that anything could so stir that sleeping, primal something deep down in the depths of her womanhood, that she could stand watching them with fierce, burning eyes.

Twice before had she seen them face each other in anger, twice had she sought to interfere, to prevent the thing to be read in their eyes. Now she stood still and rigid and yearned with all of the passion no longer dormant within her to see one man beat another man down mercilessly.

Embry struck desperately, Steele struck, they both reeled back. Embry struck again, viciously, snarling, no longer a man of ice and repression. And for the second time Bill Steele struck as Beatrice had not even guessed he could. And Embry was flung back half across the room, his mouth cut by the fierce fist, to lie prone.

And the light of battle in Embry's eyes flickered and failed, and went out, replaced at last by his fear. For one must have sought far throughout the world this morning to have found the man who could have stood up longer before the searing rage which clamored through every muscle of Bill Steele's body. Beatrice, seeing the look in his eyes, wondered, marveled, and in the end her breast rose with pride that that look in those eyes was there because of her.

Steele picked up the two guns, dropping them into his coat-pocket. Embry rose heavily.

"Joe Embry," said Steele then, his tone curt and crisp, "I have had a long talk with Mrs. Denham. She has told me a great deal; all that she knows of you and your hold on Banks and your damned schemes. And she has caught a train and gotten out of your way; if you want to know. Now listen to me; you get out of this country inside twenty-four hours or I'll put you in the pen. Understand? There's the door."

Embry stood a moment. He was hesitating, this man who had always been so sure of himself. Steele's arm, flung out, pointed to the door. Slowly Embry passed out.

Bill Steele, looking gaunt from what the night had brought him, stood looking at a girl clad in gay buckskin garb. She sat upon the edge of a table, her booted feet swinging, a warm color in her cheeks, her eyes dancing.

"Miss Corliss," he said gently, "we had better get started, hadn't we? Embry has arranged so that a lot of fool tongues are clacking, and the sooner you stop them the better."

"You're such a rough old bear of a man," she told him gaily. "Here with the

first opportunity we have for a little holiday—all by ourselves—you don't even remind me that I am a good cook. You don't even suggest going off to shoot a rabbit while I get ready to prepare breakfast."

"Beatrice Corliss," he said sharply, his eyes frowning and stern on hers, "once and for all, don't you love me the least little bit in the world?"

"Once and for all," said Beatrice Corliss, seeking to speak as gruffly as Bill Steele had spoken, "I love you with my whole heart!"

But her eyes faltered in spite of her, her cheeks were already a flaming red before he had her in his arms.

"Embry thought that I would care what people said," said Beatrice. In the mean time Steele had gotten a rabbit with a lucky shot, and both of them had cooked that very small animal. "Just to show you that I don't, we are going to have the whole day to ourselves, unchaperoned and happy. And to-morrow—"

"To-morrow you promised to marry me!" he reminded her quickly.

"To-morrow," said Beatrice softly, "we're going to Summit City in the early, early dawn, you and I, Bill Steele. You may have a preacher there or a justice of the peace or—or a sea captain! And then you are going to take a big pack on those big shoulders of yours and I am going to wear this little foolish buckskin dress—and we are going out into the forests. All by ourselves. Just the wide world and you and I, Bill Steele! And Big Man—"

"What, Beatrice?"

"Sylvia Carruthers wrote me a note the other day. And do you know what she told me? I think you are a great big bluff. She told me that when you sold Summit City to Dr. Gilchrist you let him have it ten thousand dollars cheaper than I let you have it. You are a ridiculous business man!"

But Bill Steele had hardly heard. In his brain, seeming to pulse there with the beat of his heart, were ringing the golden words:

"Just the wide world and you and I, Bill Steele!"

(The end.)

Mystery of the Orlop Deck by Captain Dingle



A STEAMER in the Mediterranean trade at times carries queer passengers, and the *Adalia* got her share when she called in at Maktaerai, homeward bound.

At Port Said she had taken on board a huge cask, part of the impedimenta of a bespectacled antiquarian who had gone on by another ship and was to join the *Adalia* in Malta. On the manifest the cask was stated to contain a precious mummy which it had been found necessary to preserve in rice spirit, owing to the wrappings having yielded to the action of time before it was unearthed.

Maktaerai was not a regular port of call; the *Adalia* put in there in response to a request from the consul in Port Said, who wished to send home five financially embarrassed seamen stranded there.

"For the peace of Egypt, captain," the consul remarked, and a smile rippled over his tired face. "They're quite harmless, but their ideas of humor don't seem to gibe with the native notion. As long as their money lasted they came near buying up the town; such little pleasantries as dressing up a camel in woman's garments, tying a parasol to the beast's neck, and driving it through the market-place and bazaars were tolerated as the pranks of illuminated

sailors. They paid for the damages, and kept open house with their liquor. But they chose an inopportune moment for carrying their lady-camel into the courtyard of the *mudir's* house; they had no money left, and after they came out of jail their grog was stopped. It's highly advisable to get them away before they start a real fuss, captain. They've had their lesson, and you'll have no trouble with them so long as you don't let them get hold of liquor."

"No real trouble!" muttered Captain Trigg, when his ship had covered half the distance to Malta. "Five past masters in deviltry, they are; ever since they clambered aboard in Maktaerai the ship's been in an uproar! Now this!"

"But they don't do anything we can get back at them for, sir," the chief mate reminded him frowningly. "They keep the ship's rules; they're civil to the officers, and are always willing to lend a hand in the men's work. And that mummy was aboard before we shipped them; you can hardly blame those men for the foolish tales of the crew that the orlop-deck is haunted."

"H-m! Don't know about that. Perhaps they've reasons to wish to be undisturbed. I put them in the orlop-berths because they'd be quite apart from every-

body else in the ship; but I didn't reserve that section for their sole private use. As soon as we get into Malta I'll shift 'em into the for'ard 'tween-decks."

The skipper took a glance around the dancing horizon, and turned to leave the bridge. At the ladder he met in full career the carpenter, white of lips, staring-eyed, inarticulate with fright.

"Steady, man, steady!" growled the skipper, shaking the already shaking hand of Chips. "What in thunder's got into you men? Stop your damn nonsense and give us the news! I thought you at least were a man, Chips!"

"The—the—that thing in the orlop, sir!" stuttered the carpenter. "I've seen it! Oh, Lord!"

"Hey! Belay that crazy stuff!" ordered the skipper savagely. He gripped the carpenter's arm, and swung him back toward the ladder. "Come with me," he said, dragging Chips after him. "I'll see what the blame ghost is myself, once and for all. Come on now!"

"It's awful, sir, just horrid," whimpered poor Chips, hanging back as much as he dared. "Sailed out of a black corner, it did, sir, without any warning. Give a screech like a damned soul, sir, may I die if it didn't, and 'twas at me, on top o' me, and past me with a whiz and a smell as fair knocked me silly, sir. The men have all been up against it, and sometimes 'tis like that, sir, and sometimes 'tis some'at horrible as don't come out, but just moans and screeches in the dark. But the thing I seen touched me, sir! Touched me! Ugh!"

Captain Trigg made no response to Chips's statement. He kept hold of his man and marched him down the after-hatchway, past the main deck, and down the narrow ladder leading to the dim, under-water level of the orlop. Here the small port-holes in the sides were continually closed; they were a scanty foot above the water-line, and only in port was it safe to open them. Every small roll of the ship dipped the glasses along one side until they were swirling green disks; then those ports opposite admitted a modicum of pale light. This, except for slender rays that slanted

down the hatchway, was all the light that came to the orlop-deck until night, when a few electric lights were switched on from the engine-room for two or three hours.

In the small square of light under the hatchway sat the five men from Maktaerai, and they saluted the skipper civilly as he passed.

He bent a keen eye on them, as if he expected to detect some evidence of amusement at Chips's fright which would help to place the responsibility for the ghost-story. But the five distressed seamen sat in a solemn row, like five wise old owls; if they were interested in this intrusion of the skipper's they showed nothing of it.

Captain Trigg experienced a queer sensation at his back after he had passed them, as if five pairs of eyes were boring into his shoulder-blades, and he swung round swiftly. Still the five men sat motionless, their stolid faces revealing nothing save a sort of bovine contentment. And these were the men who had set Maktaerai by the ears. The skipper felt the sudden heat of an unappreciative victim of a practical joke, and snapped a terse order to the five men to follow him aft.

"Now, Chips, where's this ghost of yours?" he demanded, leading the way into the darkest corner of the orlop. He kicked a stick of dunnage-wood under the big cask wherein reposed the mummy, and laughed shortly as he put the question to the distressed seamen: "You fellows live down here: have you seen anything of ghosts?"

In the dim half-light the men swayed to the ship's slight motion. Beneath their feet rumbled and throbbed the shaft; outside the iron skin of the steamer racing seas thrummed musically as they swirled past the run to meet and part at the stern-post. And with weird effect came the reply to Captain Trigg's query. It was no spirit voice; it was the hoarse voice of one of the seamen, the one standing in the darkest patch of shadow.

"Oh, Malta, with thy—hic—steps and—hic—boats—
Thy—er—holyshtones and—hic—goats!"

Then the man stepped solemnly up to the skipper, and said without cracking a smile:

"Goats, sir? Seen plenty o' goats in my time, sir. Malta's full of 'em, yeshir."

"Goats! You darned idiot, I said ghosts," shouted the skipper, with an increasing feeling that he was being fooled. "Ghosts—spirits! There's something scaring the wits out of my crew down here. What is it?"

"No ghosts here, sir," chimed in another of the five. "'Sides, you wouldn't put pore sailors where there was ghosts, now would you, sir?"

And once more the first speaker broke in: "There wash nineteen goats on Gozo, and they all fell in two-deep! Yeshir, lots o' goats in Malta, sir."

Captain Trigg stared at the man for an instant, his face reddening. They stepping swiftly forward, he seized the fellow by the ears, and pulled his head around, smelling hard at his breath.

"Chips, fetch the mate," he snapped presently. "Tell him to bring down the watch. There's no ghost here, but there's spirits all right. I want the ship searched from the engine-room bulkhead to the stern, and I want it done properly. Stay with the mate when he comes, and make a good job of it."

Then the skipper marched up to the saloon and berated the steward.

"Didn't I order you not to let those five men get hold of liquor?" he stormed.

"Yes, sir. They haven't got any from me, sir," stoutly replied the steward. "I brought every bottle in the ship out of the storeroom and locked it away in the saloon. And none of the officers or crew have had any, either, since leaving the last port."

"Then where are they getting it from?" demanded Captain Trigg. "They're three sheets in the wind now, and one of them's so slued he's spouting poetry! It's no common booze that 'll make a shellback talk poetry, steward. Can they get into the lazarette?"

"No, sir. And if they could, there's nothing there. I brought all that stuff down here, too. They must have smuggled some stuff aboard when they joined us, or else some of our crowd had some on hand and is selling it to them."

"They brought nothing with them, of that I'm certain," objected the skipper, puzzled. "And I don't think our men want to have much to do with them. They're too scared at something down there to go into the orlop unless they're obliged to. Didn't you see Chips?"

Obviously the matter was out of the steward's depth, and the skipper waited for the mate's report. It came in the shape of a definite statement that nothing was to be found in the orlop-deck except a queer smell, which might be bilge, or anything else, but was certainly not any kind of liquor known to seamen.

"And what of the ghost?" queried the skipper. "Did Chips get over his scare? Did you see anything?"

"Not a thing," returned the mate, disgusted at the ghost-story. "I laughed the carpenter out of his notion, after those five men absolutely refused to listen to any tale about ghosts in their flat. They gave Chips the laugh, too, and told me flatly that, what with ghosts and mysterious stories of them having a secret supply of liquor, they began to think the ship wasn't so much haunted as manned by lunatics."

"But man alive!" exploded the skipper, "you surely noticed that those men were not sober? You couldn't help noticing that."

"They're as sober as judges in my opinion, sir," retorted the mate, and his look and tone indicated a doubt as to the entire sanity of the skipper himself.

"Sober! If they're sober I'm slued!" snorted Captain Trigg. And the chief mate departed with a grin that said unmistakably that the latter observation might easily be true.

A velvet night descended upon the blue Mediterranean, and the *Adalia* plowed sturdily toward her port under a gold-sprinkled sky.

Still all was not well with her. In the first watch the wheel was relieved and a quartermaster went aft to read the taffrail log. The fresh helmsman showed a degree of nervousness that was reflected in his steering, calling down the fervid sea-blessings of the second mate.

The steamer was even then in the zone of submarine operations, and her commander and officers had need of all their alertness without shouldering the additional burden of scrutinizing bad steering. Then came the quartermaster with his report, and he came on the run, stuttering with fright.

At almost the same moment the wireless picked up a warning from a distant cruiser that a Turkish submarine must be looked for, and the skipper came on to the bridge while the second officer was frantically striving to squeeze a coherent tale from the quartermaster. The helmsman was slavering at the wheel, and showed signs of bolting.

"Now what in thunder's the matter?" demanded Captain Trigg angrily.

"That ghost! It's around the after-hatch this minute, sir!" bleated the quartermaster, shivering. The helmsman incontinently fled, and the second mate darted after him.

"Let him go!" snapped the skipper. "He's useless like that. Here, take the wheel yourself. I'll fetch the mate up, and you'll divide tricks between you until I can get to the bottom of this infernal tomfoolery! Ghosts! Rubbish!"

"Maybe some of those consul's passengers would stand a trick, sir," suggested the second mate, who hardly relished the notion of adding a trick at the wheel to his lookout duties, especially with a hostile submarine in the near vicinity.

Captain Trigg hurried aft and descended to the orlop-deck, in no fear of ghosts or other mysterious visitants. His boldness was justified. He found five innocent, distressed seamen, peacefully snoring away the dark hours, who evinced sleepy-eyed astonishment at their unceremonious awakening.

"Here, you men, I need helmsmen," he announced when his eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom. He picked out a likely man. "You'll do for the first trick. I'll make it up to you when we get in. You can steer, I suppose?"

"Shteer, shir? Sh'd say so! Shtudied under Ponsus Pilot, sir, and shteered th' very frisht open boat as ever came over the

Alps! Yes, shir, I'll take a trick. Glad to."

"Good Lord!" gasped the skipper, utterly routed. He could look for no help here. He peered hard into the faces of the men, suspecting that this was their original method of escaping work. Even in the cold light of the stars through the hatchway the faces were blank and stolid. In the speech of the men was additional evidence that they had access to liquor of sorts; but he had no intention of wasting time just then in further search for the source.

The thing that had thrown a scare into his crew was more vital, in view of the coming possible encounter with a creeping undersea enemy.

He stepped a few paces aft, peering and sniffing into the darkest crannies. The men stood where he had left them, disinterested onlookers, at least outwardly. Presently the skipper stopped, sniffing harder, and as he turned he snapped the question:

"What's the mystery down here? If there's anything queer about this deck that is sending my crew nutty, you fellows must know something about it. What's the ungodly smell?"

"Smell, sir?" echoed the student of "Ponsus Pilot" blandly, and without a suspicion of impediment. "Don't smell anything, sir. The carpenter said he smelled brimstone, but I can't. Can you chaps?" he asked his mates.

"Brimstone me bonnet!" growled a man in deep shadow. "That quartermaster as woke us up with his howls yelled as he smelled sulfur, too; and some o' the crew as came down here swore they seen green eyes and heard shrieks about our quarters. Fine passage, I calls it, when pore fellers as is distressed seamen has to put up with a shipload o' balmy deck-swabs!"

"But there is a strange smell!" insisted the skipper, sniffing again. "I smell it plainly."

"It must be snuff, sir," explained the leader of the distressed five. "We ain't allowed to smoke down here, sir—s'gainst rules, and good sailors obeys rules, sir. We takes snuff, or chews it, most of us. A

couple of us chews ginger, as can't manage snuff, sir. That's all the smell I knows on."

"That's just it!" burst out the skipper, recognizing the truth of the statement. "It's snuff all right, and ginger. I recognize it now. And the green eyes—I see them, too."

He gazed along the dark run of the steamer, where a row of port-holes lit up intermittently with phosphorescent foam as the motion of the ship dipped them.

"All right, men, if you won't help out with the steering, I suppose you won't. I can't make you as long as I've got my full crew. But I'll show my skulking scum what their bally ghost is as soon as daylight peeps. I might as well tell you, too, that there's a Turk submarine about, and you'd better sleep light."

The men evinced no more interest at the announcement than they had at other statements. They stood listlessly by as Captain Trigg stepped into the square of the hatch and started to ascend the ladder. Then, in a patch of blackness by the mummy cask, sounded a weird, cery sound, and the knot of men sprang to life. One of them darted in the direction of the sound like a flash, and there followed a muffled scuffling, while the rest stood stock-still and anxiously watched the skipper's retreating form. The sound had not reached him, and the four men at the hatch crept back to rejoin their mate with vast relief on their faces.

"Did he hear it?" whispered the one.

"Not a sound!" whispered the others, and the five went back to their bunks and filled the orlop-deck with chuckles of silent mirth.

Through the greater part of the night the Adalia's officers steered and watched. Then toward morning success attended their efforts to ridicule the fright out of the crew, and in the morning watch the helm was relieved much as usual, permitting them to apply all their vigilance to the lookout for the reported submarine. The steering was not all that might be desired, but it sufficed, and by breakfast-time the example of the quartermasters had been followed by the deck-hands to the

extent of performing the customary cleaning up of the decks and bridge.

"There are two things I'd like to know before we get blown up," remarked Captain Trigg, as he swept the sparkling blue sea with his binoculars. "One is, what in thunder made old Chips mistake port-glasses and ginger for goggle-eyes and brimstone. The other is, where those fellows are getting their liquor. For they're getting it all right; as much as they want of it."

"Maybe the two things fit in, sir," replied the mate sententiously. "Perhaps Chips didn't see things as bad as he made out. Maybe he came across their stock, and they shared it with him and persuaded him to help along the ghost-story in order to keep others away. You remember neither you, nor the second, nor I have seen anything out of the way; and I'm not so sure that more than one or two of the crew did, either. There were a couple of men in my watch who looked fishy-eyed once or twice; and if they were squared like Chips was they'd easily persuade the rest of our knock-kneed Levantines about the spooks."

"Hum! You may be right," mused the skipper. "I'll thresh it out if we ever get into Malta."

The early part of the forenoon watch passed without sensation; then the second mate, who had been keeping lookout at the foremast-head, hailed the deck:

"Submarine in the nor'west, sir! Conning tower out and decks awash, heading this way."

Now the Adalia's company had other things than ghosts to occupy their attention. Captain Trigg had not had previous experience with steel and gasoline pirates; but men of his acquaintance had, and he was old enough to profit by the experience of others.

He held his course, but meanwhile his boats were being swung out, and he proceeded to get his papers in order. When he returned to the bridge, the gray gooberfish was speeding toward the Adalia within two miles, and the cascade of white water at her snout was evidence enough that she had the heels of the steamer.

"Couldn't we take a chance with her, sir?" hinted the mate, his ruddy face showing his distaste for sheeplike submission. "The wireless report said she's been operating around here some time. Maybe she's out of torpedoes; we can't tell; and if she's bluffing, we might outbluff her."

"You can see those guns, can't you?" retorted the skipper grimly. "He's got three knots on us for speed, at least, and could sink us now if he didn't want to give us a chance. No; carry on with the boats, and get the men ready; then we'll still have a chance to get clear if he does pop a fish into us. It's lucky we're in easy reach of Valetta."

Down on the after-deck, by the orlop-deck hatch, the five distressed seamen stood curiously watching the oncoming menace. From their attitudes they entertained little alarm; they chatted together quietly, and when they moved there was no haste apparent. Then, when the first of the *Adalia's* boats swung out in the davits and hung in the tackles, four of them hurried below, their first show of quick action, while the fifth remained at the rail, taking in all the details of the rapidly approaching encounter.

A swart officer in the submarine's conning tower hailed, and the steamer stopped. Then the *Adalia* dropped a boat, which put off to the smaller craft, and returned full of armed seamen.

There was little enough of the smart naval personnel about that submarine's crew. She was a Turk, and her men looked the part. The officer mounted to the bridge and demanded the ship's papers, which Captain Trigg had ready to hand. Meanwhile the armed seamen disposed themselves about the bridge-ladders, the engine-room hatch, and at the rail, while the steamer's men shuffled about uneasily, all work about the boats being for the moment suspended.

Looking down the manifest, the Turkish officer uttered a soft ejaculation, and turned to the skipper with a suave smile.

"Ah, captain, you carry a mummy from old Egypt, I see. It's a pity to destroy those relics of a mighty past, don't you think? A great pity."

"Hum! I suppose it is," grunted Captain Trigg surlily enough. "I haven't heard of your fellows expressing that kind of sentiment before, though."

And, prompted by some imp of mischief, he added: "It won't make any difference to you, I expect, but I may tell you that the mummy you mention happens to be the reputed body of your famous Saladin, sir!"

"Saladin! But from Egypt?" exclaimed the Turk, half in doubt, half in ecstasy. "But it cannot be!"

"Oh, it's right enough, I believe," the skipper assured him, hiding the twinkle in his eye under a frown of ill humor. "We shipped him in Port Said, it's true; but it came originally from Palestine by all accounts."

"Oh, then I must put that sacred relic aboard my vessel, captain. I cannot permit it to go to the bottom of the sea with your ship." The Turk beamed with the consciousness of a magnanimous act proposed.

"As you will, sir," returned Trigg. He stepped to the bridge-rail in search of the bosun, who would be needed to break out the cask and any other goods the submarine cared to requisition. The remaining one of the five distressed seamen had edged up to the bridge-ladder when the boat ran aboard, and now he caught the skipper's eye.

He had heard all that was said immediately above his head. Now he shook his head in a violent negative, swiftly repeated as the skipper stared inquiringly at him, and as soon as Captain Trigg saw his drift and winked acknowledgment, stepped to the after-hatch and disappeared in search of his mates. The skipper turned back to the Turkish officer.

"I'll show it to you, sir," he said, and smiled regretfully. "I expect you'll find some difficulty in getting it up, though, unless you send some of your own men down—" The Turk shot a keen glance of warning at him, and Captain Trigg hastened to add: "Oh, I'm not going to try any tricks, captain. Fact is, my ship's been in an uproar ever since we sailed, on account of that mummy. All my crew

are scared to go down to the orlop-deck; they claim it's haunted now."

"Haunted!" The Turk's tone held a world of contempt. "I thought we Easterners alone held on to superstition, captain. They told me so in London and Berlin, where I completed my studies."

"Maybe so, sir," returned Trigg, shrugging his shoulders. "Anyhow, I must confess there has been something queer down there since the great Saladin took passage with us. I've felt it in some degree myself."

The mate was staring at his commander in goggle-eyed amazement. The second mate, who had remained aloft until the boat boarded the ship, now made his way up to the bridge and stood close to the skipper, listening with wide ears.

The Turk stepped to the rail, whistled shrilly, and shouted an order to the submarine for another boat-crew; and in that moment the second mate hissed a report into Captain Trigg's ear that brought back a glint to his eyes.

Once more the Adalia's boat went off, and now it returned with more armed men who brought several packages of bombs. The submarine's own small boat, too, came back, and the low, gray terror of the seas edged closer. Then the Turk gave his final orders.

"All right, captain," he said, reading down the ship's articles. "Bring up your crew. You will check them off into your remaining boats and let them lie-to off your port beam. Then you will accompany me and my men below. When your mummy is taken out and transferred to my boat, you will follow your men, while my own fellows place bombs about your steamer. Come; call up your crew."

One by one the Adalia's men came up, were talked off by the articles, and descended dumbly into the waiting boats. Then Captain Trigg led the Turks to the after-hatch, sending a swift glance down to the eastward, and covertly watching to see how the submarine was lying. She was lying close alongside the steamer, whose boats were pulling slowly around the bows to the other side.

"Here you are, sir," he told the Turk-

ish officer, indicating the open hatch. "You'll find it dark down here, for we've only one of the old-fashioned electric plants, and it's off all day. Have you lights?"

"Come," jerked the Turk, producing a pocket torch.

His men had torches, too, and the dim orlop-deck was speckled with splotches of brilliant light that seemed to accentuate the darkness of the corners.

Cautiously Captain Trigg moved aft, for the lower deck was stowed with light freight besides the mummy, which lay in the run, opposite the orlop-berths. The Turk was more eager, and he and his men outstripped the skipper as soon as the latter had shown them the big cask. In a few moments the creak of the cask was heard as it rolled from its bed of dunnage-wood; and in the same instant the orlop-deck rang with unearthly howls and shrieks. The Turks halted as if shot; even the cynical officer started back a step, and Captain Trigg, taken wholly by surprise, was brought up standing, too."

"What is it?" demanded the officer, falling back upon Trigg.

"Don't know. I told you there was something queer down here," muttered the skipper, an unbelievable hope springing up within him. He just recollected that the five distressed seamen had not been on the articles, which they should have been, and in tallying off the crew he had overlooked them in the stress of the situation. —

"It's nothing," growled the Turk, and vociferously ordered his men forward. They laid hands on the cask containing the illustrious Saladin, and rolled it six inches. In a flash the dark den was a small pandemonium.

Again those unearthly screams pealed forth; a choking odor caught at nostrils and throat; a wavering green light appeared and hovered about the seams of the cask, and with a crash the wooden staves flew apart. The green light blazed forth, and with a shriek as of a soul in torment, something flashed from the wreck of the cask and flew among the horrified Turks. They fled, howling, up the hatchway. The officer hesitated one second, glaring toward

the apparition; the thing sprang past him with a scream; he flashed a look at the skipper, who took his cue from the men and was already in flight.

The Turkish officer passed Captain Trigg at the ladder, bursting past him without a by-y'r-leave, and was on deck before the skipper had got a foot fairly on the lower step.

Trigg followed, but not too hurriedly, for as he stepped on the ladder a hoarse voice whispered to him from a patch of blackness:

"Take yer time, cap'n; take yer time. They won't come back, and they forgot to plant their bombs. How fur off's that cruiser th' second mate sighted, sir?"

"Oh, it's you, eh?" gasped Trigg, almost bursting with relief. "Why, she's showing her smoke now. Come on up. They've bundled into a boat, I think; I can't hear a sound on deck."

As he spoke, that uncanny shriek again rang in his ears, and something flashed over his shoulder, up the ladder, and out of sight on deck, while the gloomy orlop-deck rumbled with hoarse guffaws of laughter. Something attacked the skipper's olfactory nerves, as well, and he reached the deck himself in a paroxysm of sneezing.

Once more in open daylight, though his eyes were streaming, he swiftly took in the new situation. His own boats lay much where they had been before, except that the mate's boat was heeled over heavily to one side while her crew struggled with something fighting in the sea alongside.

The submarine showed a sudden accession of frantic haste, and scarcely waited to stow her small boat in its nest. Her conning-tower hatch clanged shut, she plunged, and in a few minutes the stick-like periscope, with its wake of swirling froth, was the sole sign of her existence. And, steaming twenty-five knots across the Adalia's bows, fair in the wake of that periscope, foamed the big gray war-ship that had given warning of the submarine's proximity.

Captain Trigg cupped his hands and bawled the order for the boats to return, then turned to the five distressed seamen, looking now the reverse of distressed.

Plucking a crumpled paper from his pocket, he smoothed it, read it, and looked inquisitively at the men. Then he grinned.

"When did you fellows slip this onto my desk?" he asked. "And how much was guesswork?"

"All guesswork, sir," chuckled the leader of the five. "I slipped it to you as soon as the warning came of that submarine. Us didn't know nothing; but we're all good seamen, sir, and wanted to make up for some o' the pranks we've played you. Worked, too, didn't it?"

"Hum!" grunted Trigg, and reread the paper with a twinkle. It ran:

Get this by heart, captain, and it ain't fooling neither. The spirit of Saladin, the great Turk, is in that mummy cask. If the submarine boards you, and she's a Turk, don't by no means touch that barrel. Tell the Turks it's Saladin's mummy, and don't make no error. Let them handle it. They'll be sure to want to take it if they know what it is. We knows this because we helped dig it up, and knows the fuss there was about it. If you can get them to go down after it, leave the rest to the five distressed seamen. And *don't count us when he asks for the crew list.*

The boats were crawling up to the ladder now, and the first was hooking on. Captain Trigg was still in a maze; the entire chapter of events was a dark page to him. He went up to the bridge, ready to take charge again, and beckoned the five men after him. Then he faced the leader and demanded an explanation.

"Everything," he insisted. "What was all the ghost stuff about? Where's the mummy now? And what's your connection with the whole business?"

And while his mates gurgled with merriment, the leader of the five explained:

"Fust of all, sir, we five men engaged out to an old professor to dig mummies and other truck in back of Maktaerai. He dug up a frowsty old doll, and had to soak her in liquor to keep her fresh. Then he jewed us out of our pay, so we had to get even with him. The natives made a big holler about him taking the mummy away; and he left us to ship the barrel off and face the rumpus he'd raised.

"He had two casks both alike fixed up, and sent by different routes, one by the ship he went in, and the other is the one

you shipped. He had just a little private mark on the right one to tell it by.

"He figgered that way he stood a double chance of getting by, for he insured both barrels, and meant to claim for either of 'em if anything happened to the ship they traveled in. Well, to shorten the yarn, we spotted the cask as soon as we took them bunks in your orlop.

"We all had been hitting high spots in Maktaerai, and had a awful thirst. So we played the ghost game to keep the crew out of our den. That was the ghost, sir, as the mate's boat picked up. A great, yellow cat as we found before coming aboard. We used to shove her head in a bag o' snuff and ginger whenever anybody come below; and you heard how she yowled and spit. Run? She'd run through anything while she was sneezing, and we always got her again; she never got on deck.

"And 'twas easy to go a bit further for the Turks, by emptying the cask and putting pussy inside, with her nose-bag on, after smearing the inside of the tub with phosphorous paint as we got from Chips. Green flare powder, too, we—yes, sir," the man grinned. "Chips was in it with us. He give us the information about the submarine as well as the cruiser."

"Damn his eyes!" swore Captain Trigg softly, withal he smiled. "So you started that ghost-story so as to have a free hand with a cask of raw rice spirits, eh? Then the real mummy is safe in Malta by now, I suppose?"

"No, sir, it ain't," chorused the five with broad grins.

"But—what—why, you don't mean to tell me you've been tapping the mummy for your liquor?" gasped the skipper.

"Oh, no, cap'n, nothin' like that, sir. That mummy's still in Maktaerai. We had to get our pay out of that old shark, y' know. So we hocked the old doll to the *mudir* for money to pay for our jamboree. He got it all back in damages and fines, but we had a royal time, didn't we, boys?"

"Betcher life!" roared the crowd; and they looked it.

The mate climbed painfully up the bridge-ladder, and a seaman followed, carrying a great yellow cat.

"This is what we picked up, sir," reported the mate sourly. "It had some gadget tied to its neck, so I thought you might like to examine it."

"Right you are," chuckled the skipper, nodding to one of the five to come forward and take his pet. "That's the ghost of Saladin, the great Turk, Mr. Mate. I'm glad you rescued him, for I remember you assured me of the non-existence of a ghost in my ship."

Then, waving a man to take the wheel, he managed to add before scuttling to the chart-room to hide his mirth: "Get her on her course as soon as the engine-room gives you steam. Course is nor'-nor'-east for Grand Harbor. And if that Turk shows up again, which by the signs yonder I don't think he will, just stand on the rail and wave that yellow pussy at him, won't you?"



Mallory Mixes In by

Olin L. Lyman

THE sleek auburn hair of the unknown charmer was to Richard Mallory's susceptible eyes as the lure of the sunset glow now suffusing Manhattan. She was descending the stairs of the Third Avenue Elevated Station in the Eighties ahead of him. As she gained the walk there occurred an incident which quickened Dick's progress down the stairway.

His lean sinewy hand fell upon the shoulder of a big smirking masher who had fallen in step with the girl, grasping her arm and leaning over familiarly as she

caught the arm of the bewildered girl, swung her around the edges of the jam and with an assumption of unconcern walked her again up the stairway of the "L" as a policeman appeared running across the street to where the dazed masher was painfully recovering his feet.

There sounded the roar of an approaching train. Mallory ran the girl up the rest of the way, slammed down a dime, thrust two tickets in the chopper and they just made a car before the gate slammed shut. They wedged in on a platform filled with passengers.

what damaged by contact with the masher's *embonpoint*. "It's thinkin' *with* 'em, sometimes."

The train halted and they alighted. "Where do you live?" asked beauty's rescuer.

"On Lexington Avenue."

"Can I see you home?"

"Well," she answered, "the would-be lady killers seem to be pretty thick this evenin', and you're some fender. Yes, I guess you can."

She glanced at him curiously as they reached the foot of the stairway.

"Did you ever play football?" she asked.

"You mean the way I butted him? Oh, yes, I've charged many a line, halfback an' quarter. I was always a wafer but I'd worm through. I worked it on him because he was a husky Charlie. He was twice my size."

"I'm crazy about football," she declared.

"I go to every game in the city I can. Are you a doctor?"

"This case, you mean? Oh, no. Samples in that. I'm a salesman."

"Oh, that must be fine! What do you sell?"

His answering grin was somewhat forced.

"Oh, most everything," he replied. And for the past five months, or since the glad new year when he had unexpectedly found himself out of a job, he had.

Presently she paused before a presentable apartment on Lexington Avenue.

"Well, this is where I live," she said, nodding brightly. "Thank you so much for mashing the masher."

She ran lightly up the steps. He remained, in approved form, with his hat raised from his red head, till she should enter. She fumbled in her hand-bag.

"Well, what do you know?" she exclaimed. "I've forgotten my key! I'll have to ring."

Her voice, like Annie Laurie's or some dame's or other, he couldn't think which, was low and sweet. Her neck—no, it was *not* like a swan's. How would any up to date New York girl look with a swan's neck?

Presently she turned with a gesture of dismay.

"I forgot!" she told him. "The folks are down-town and they won't be back till ten o'clock!"

"That's easy fixed," he returned joyfully. "I mixed in for you once this evenin', with the old boy at the station. Now let me mix in with you for the eats, an' I'll be your watchdog Towser till your folks get back."

She considered the proposition.

"Won't any one be expectin' you home?"

He made the response, of irresponsible tragedy, that might be made by uncounted thousands in New York town.

"Who, me? Not any. I'm a roomer."

Slowly she descended the stairs. He feasted his susceptible eyes. Her lamps, were they auburn like her hair? He almost thought so. And her gown was made of stuff that sort of matched the assemble.

He had never before so thoroughly admired those Beulah Land shoes the girls were wearing. And the skirts, too; not only were there vouchsafed the sons of women glimpses of bewitching ankles, but a lot of germs must be dying of starvation this season. There wasn't a lot of superfluous cloth to be gathering 'em up.

"I really must eat somewhere," acknowledged this fascinating daughter of Eve, "so it might as well be with you."

"That sounds like the old Florodora sextet I've heard about," he submitted, falling into step with her. "Let's grab a car across the park and hit some place on Broadway."

"All right. Only remember, some little place. This is strictly Dutch."

"Oh, no!" he began to expostulate, aghast. "I asked you—"

She interrupted him.

"I won't go, unless. Why, I wouldn't think of letting you pay for my dinner! I don't even know your name—"

"It's Mallory, Dick Mallory—"

"Mine's Miriam Zeigler—"

"Well, Miss Zeigler, the pleasure's all mine—"

"Mine, too. I've always wanted to see somebody hit a masher."

"Say!" he breezed enthusiastically. "Talk about luck! I'm glad he braced

you. It gave me a ready made excuse. I've seen you on the trains at about that same hour lots of times, and I wished I knew you, but I wouldn't think of speakin', of course without a knockdown. But about this little dinner, it ain't right, you know. I asked you—"

She waved her hand-bag determinedly.

"Another word about that little thing and I'll eat by my lonesome!" she threatened.

Under the disturbing influence of which terrible threat he subsided and they caught a car, rumbling across the park as night fell and the lights winked awake in the soft June air.

She selected a modest little restaurant on Broadway and they chatted over a light repast. When they had finished Mallory looked at his watch.

"Eight-thirty," he said. "What do you say to walking back to the park and sittin' there a few minutes, till you have to go back home? It's a grand evenin' for parkin'; air's warm and the moonlight is ripplin' on the lake."

"I believe you," she agreed. "Sure! We'll go back that way."

He let her pay her own check without objection, but a few blocks farther on he gently but decisively halted her in front of a candy store.

"Now ain't I been good?" he demanded. "But you've got to let me buy you a few Huylers to crunch on. You don't want me to feel like a cheap-skate, do you?"

"Well," she conceded, "if it's a little box."

So he bought her a small box of sweets, and they wandered up West Eighty-First Street, past Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, to the garden spot of the city.

Now Central Park is given over in the summer days to squirrels and children, and in the summer nights to lovers. On every bench the swains are swaining. Till ten o'clock soft breathed vows are volleyed back and forth; eyes spiel love to eyes that spiel again; the talcum powder dusts off upon incalculable numbers of manly shoulders.

Who shall tell how many feminine names have been changed through this insidious

spell of the park wherein Cupid, the cut-up, punctures the plans of humans who had thought to live alone?

Richard Mallory and Miriam Zeigler walked through winding shadowed paths fringed with greenery, bushes in bloom and stately trees. The melodies of the June night rendered the essence of earth's harmonies; here and there the subdued radiance of an electric light accentuated nocturnal beauty; above them glittered the questioning stars and the bulbous moon. They walked on and on, seeking an unoccupied bench.

It was Miriam who discovered it. She and Dick beat out a pair hastening from the opposite direction by about five seconds. The baffled invaders gave the preempted bench a twin look of hate and passed on.

"Trouble is," remarked Mallory, staring after them, "the benches don't keep up with the increase of population."

"Forget 'em," urged the girl happily. "We got here first. Isn't it pretty?"

Mallory gave cursory attention to grave sentinel trees, a soft breeze murmuring, the tinkling of a fountain near-by. Then, with urbanity born of long practise in putting over verbal tributes to a sex he loved, he did himself proud.

"It all makes a good settin' for you," he said.

"You say it well," she retorted. "There are a lot of girls in New York, are there not?"

"There are not!" he asserted. "There's only one, and she's all to the tiger lilies. It's the first time I ever sprung as deep a one as that, believe me! Of course, I've had to talk nice to some of 'em so as not to hurt their feelin's, but there comes a time when you *mean* it."

"Huh!" she scoffed. "You're there with the molasses, all right. Did you say you sold goods? I'll bet it's goods for women!"

"You're wrong. I sell to men; *sell*, mind you. But in my off hours I love to prattle to the ladies, they're so different. But since I met you—well, a sundae has got a plain soda spilled into the pail."

His arm lay outspread on the back of the bench behind her shoulders. He judged it best to let it remain there for the present.

This maid was no natural born fusser, that was evident. All at once her desirability increased a hundred per cent.

For the fiftieth time in his several and twenty years Mallory felt disgruntled with the estate of bachelorhood. Holy Hymen, a pulchritudinous pal, double harness; that was the life! The hectic Mallory pulses stirred as never before.

At this momentous moment, tautologically speaking, she gave him a cue.

"Somehow a night like this makes you kind o' sore on yourself; makes you want to get on. You seem so kind of *fixed* where you are, and you look up at the stars and you want to climb up a little closer, if you get what I mean."

There spoke a *real* girl. The breast of Mallory, that ever pinnacled the gentler sex, felt a warm glow. Such a girl should be the future Mrs. Mallory. He had suffered many disappointments in the garden of love; the lemons had run neck and neck with the peaches. But with such a wife behind him; why, he'd own a calendar company the first she knew.

Richard was nothing if not sudden. To institute his swiftly conceived campaign for the changing of Miss Zeigler's name he must first get possession of her hand. While holding it his intention might reach her by telepathy and pave the way to the altar. By such means did the ranks of the flat dwellers increase.

"Let's see your hand," he casually suggested, and took it. It felt smooth and cool within his own. "I got your wireless," he pursued, "an' I rise like a yeast-cake to the occasion. I'm Professor Nutcake, the palmist. What you're up against is like the primer to me. Soothsayin', one cent."

"I see by your palm that your husband will stand pat with clots o' hair, like Lou-Tellegen's. That means you got a sweet disposition. There is about you an air of dyspeptic intellect, as if your astral self didn't agree with itself. Now I got it; you're a native of New York an' yowlin' to be free; your soul is whinin' for somethin' above an' beyond little old Manhattan. This town's on the level; you want the hills."

"What's the answer?" she laughed.

"Marry a travelin' man," he replied triumphantly. "Get a han'some husband with hyphenated hair to take you away from here on trips. As Professor Nutcake, the pansy blossom palmist, I've steered four thousand and seventy-three matrimonial barks out on the sea of contribution an' not one of 'em has bumped its nose on a rock."

"You marry a travelin' man an' travel with him. Go to Utica, Rome, and Gloversville; perch on the up in Up-State; hit the high places. Amble around the Adirondacks; they make the Catskills look like kittens. That way, by getting away from here, you'll get next to yourself. You'll be chantin', 'New York's a mess of tips an' tripe, this mountain life for me. A mountain maid I'd be, old kid, a mountin' I should be.' Repeat softly, boys, an' ease off on the high tenor, Bill. You sound like a glass factory hit by a Krupp. That 'll be about all, miss. One plunker, please. Good morgenstein."

She gave him the searching look of an alienist.

"As you go up, the air gets thinner, does it not?" she asked. "It does. An' it affects your head. Heavens! We must be pretty high!"

Slowly but irrevocably she removed her hand from his. Under the circumstances he judged it well to leave his arm listless on the back of the bench. She breezed on with some views of the future diametrically different from his swiftly conceived own.

"What yaps girls are to get married! That is, so early. Look at 'em around the park to-night. 'Will you be my little tootsy?' says he. 'Yes,' says she; 'what's your last name, deary? It won't matter how it sounds, anyway, I'm yours.' You see? She's in such a hurry! That's all wrong; she ought to take time to look around, an' in the mean time she can be a business woman."

He stared at her. Never in his life had he wanted a life partner as he wanted—confound it, what *was* her name, anyway? He strove desperately to recall it; to forget it might prove awkward at any moment.

She rose.

"We must be getting on. The folks will be gettin' back. Say, that was a funny take off on marriage that you sprung."

He answered in words too seldom few.

"Think so?"

"Yes," she laughed. "It took off what you always run against; the fellow's going to live for her and her only, and the girl believes him. He's going to take her places, an' instead of that, when they're married he leaves her at home an' goes off an' plays Kelly pool."

"A lot of 'em do that," he acknowledged; "but take me, when I get married it 'll be to a chum. I won't spill any beans runnin' around. I'll settle down to my own gas-log, an' help clutter up the kitchenette—"

"You think so, now. Bet you'd belong to every secret order in town—"

"Not any," he alleged, "'cept the salesmen's brotherhood, of course—"

"Of course! Salesmen are the worst old tramps! Every letter that comes to a salesman at his flat is forwarded. No, I think a girl ought to wait a while to pick an' choose, an' when she's married it ought to be to some one steady, an' stick at home like the owner of a delicatessen store. While she's waitin' she can be a business woman. I'm goin' to be a business woman."

"Are you?"

"Oh, my, yes! I'm attendin' business college now. Almost ready to start work. Stenography an' bookkeeping."

For the remainder of the distance to her home on Lexington Avenue her alert young mind was wholly off the subject of marriage and giving in marriage. She prattled to him of pot-hooks and the intricacies of the ledger. He followed her cue with some amusing incidents of his recent sales career, in which he carried a varied line of advertising "junk," as he termed it. He did not touch on his former experience as a calendar salesman. For several months it had been a sore point with him.

They stood before her apartment; there was a light in the window.

"I've enjoyed the evenin'," she told him earnestly. "I'd ask you in, but my step-father's strict. He don't think I'm old enough to receive gentleman company."

"Tell me," he urged, very serious, as he stood with straw hat in hand, "do you think *all* salesmen would make bad husbands?"

"No," she slowly acknowledged, moving up the steps, "there might be exceptions."

"Remember that!" he answered meaningly, and moved away.

While she stood pondering by the bell, ere pressing it, her straight brows met in a puzzled frown.

"Now what *did* he say his name was?" she murmured.

Buying a cigar at a near-by stand, Mallory scowled as a sudden recollection intruded.

"What was her name?" he asked himself. "Hanged if I can recall it!"

He decided to look up the door-plate next day, if he didn't meet her on the "elevated." He had seen her on two occasions prior to this evening, and had wished he knew her. And even now it was almost as if he didn't. Such were the tricks of fate. But he would change things.

However, fate once more crimped the plans of Mallory. The next morning the haberdashery house that was now employing him sent him twenty miles up the Hudson. Then they kept him working additional towns up the river. His salary was a joke, but its absence would have been a serious matter.

So he submitted and kept the mails reasonably full of applications for a change in jobs. Included was a letter to Harry Smith, the sales manager of Zingwall & Co., Limited, calendar manufacturers and dealers, Mallory's former employers, and with whom he devoutly hoped to be again one day.

It was approaching Thanksgiving Day when Richard, in a little town near Albany, received a letter which caused him to chortle with joy. He lost no time in presenting himself before Harry Smith at Zingwall's establishment in New York.

"Do you think you can stick with a real concern now, and not go flying off with a wildcat concern like the Beck Calendar Company, Incorporated, as you did before?" asked Smith with a grim smile.

Dick's eyes shone.

"Try me!" he rejoined succinctly. "I've been out a year. I've sold everything from collar-buttons to shoe-laces. Believe me, a calendar man is a prince alongside the jobs I've had. I'll be too proud to speak to myself."

"You're on," replied the sales manager. "It's a vacancy on the city sales force. Delavan has gone West. Guess you've learned something since our last talk. Hop to it!"

So Mallory hopped, and was happy with the two tall, thin calendar-cases. He jumped to the fore; he forged far ahead of his drawing account. He soon purchased joyous raiment, discarding the seedy attire of less prosperous days; he affected a front room on the second floor instead of the third floor back; he was an exultant dynamo. Harry Smith beheld and smiled his grim smile; he knew men.

Had Richard forgotten the girl of the Elevated, the upper Broadway restaurant, and Central Park? He had not. As soon as possible he went over to Lexington Avenue. He couldn't remember which apartment she lived in. He employed a process of elimination, ascending the steps and examining the name-plates. With the right one memory would get on the job. But it didn't. Dick descended the last flight of steps discouraged.

A young man chanced to follow him down. He had an inspiration. He described the girl and asked if she lived in that neighborhood.

"In this same apartment," he was told with enthusiasm. "She was a peach! But they moved away months ago. No, I don't know their name. There's a lot of folks in this town you know, boy, and it's a movie film."

Mallory went away, disgruntled. Luck was a tough thing. And for a girl whose name he couldn't remember she certainly stuck in his mind.

Just before the first of each year the calendar companies gather their forces. For a twelvemonth artists and designers have been busy, the samples are made up. With the dawn of the new year all the reputable companies, under agreement, shoot their salesmen out on an appointed day with the

commodity that nobody wants, but which most of them have to have—to give away. In which situation lies the peculiarity of the calendar game.

Some cheaper concerns kite their product a month or more ahead of the "regulars," but their resources do not enable them to compete with the "class" trade.

All calendars, of course, are practically sold a year ahead. Orders, for instance, are taken in the dawn of 1916 for 1917 calendars, as the imprinting for patrons must be done as the orders come in, and delivery is usually made the latter part of the year. The campaign is a whirlwind for six months, and is thereafter subdued. Salesmen are shooed away by ennuied "prospects."

Early in December Mallory found Harry Smith in the stock-room, scowling over a big pile of *de luxe* calendars.

"Nice lump of wastage there," said Smith. "'October Eve.' I like it myself, but the chief has soured on it. Nothing but the picture is finished, see? He stopped work even before the imprint was put on the cards. He thinks it isn't up to our standard. It's a dead loss unless we can get some other calendar house to take 'em off our hands, and that's out of the question; it's too late. Put it down to profit and loss."

"What's it worth?" asked Mallory.

Smith rapidly figured the quantity, considered a moment, and added a figure.

"A thousand dollars," he answered. "Under the circumstances, twenty-five per cent less than actual cost."

"Give me the memo," suddenly said Mallory, a cold gleam in his blue eye. "I'm not promising, but I think I can sell that little lot of color junk for you."

"Where?" asked Smith dubiously.

"I'll phone you, or maybe I'll bring in the order," replied Dick, and departed with his cases.

He went directly to the down-town calendar house of Beck & Company, Incorporated, sent in his card, and was admitted to the presence of Flo Beck, the head of the concern.

Flo Beck, short and pudgy and of generally amiable expression that ended at his

cold eyes, changed color at sight of Mallory, who had been for a brief space of time his chief of city salesmen, and had left his employ under unforgettable circumstances a year before.

"No malice of uncharity, Mr. Beck," grinned Mallory. "Bygones keep chasin' bygones off the map. I'm with Zingwall now. I heard you'd run short, somehow, on stock for the comin' campaign, an' was lookin' for a good additional subject or two. If that's so, I might as well make a little money dealin' with you as with anybody. Is it so?"

It was so. Twenty minutes later Mallory made out the order in the book on his knee and handed the book for Beck to sign. Dick was in the full swing of hypnotic eloquence regarding the bargain Beck was getting; Flo signed the order with a degree of absent-mindedness unusual to him in such transactions, and Mallory picked up his cases and left.

Ten minutes later he poked his red head in at Flo's door.

"Say, Mr. Beck," he called, "I clean forgot to hand you the carbon copy of the order, so I just came back and handed it to your filing clerk. I took the liberty because I used to be here an' know the ropes. Is it all right?"

"Sure," replied Beck, smiling with the exception of his eyes. Mallory went back to Harry Smith and reported.

"What?" ejaculated that worthy. "Well, say, you know you, as well as every other salesman in our employ, are responsible for all cash and credits under the new rule?"

"Of course I know that."

"Well, our requirement on accounts is thirty days. Beck will string us along for a year. Of course, he'll pay in the end, but he's slow as molasses and tricky as a Mexican. The money is so much velvet, but I don't know as we want the bother. The financial department will have me hanging by the heels on it. Of course, I get your view-point; 'you want your commission.'"

"I want more than that, Harry. I want revenge. But I'll get my commission in thirty days, if it comes to that."

"How're you going to do that? He'll never pay in thirty days in this world."

"Oh, yes, he will! But, just for the fun of it, don't you think you'd better let him kid himself along for sixty, or even ninety?"

He outspread the Beck order before his chief. Smith caught the "joker" at a glance, and began to laugh.

"*Shylock* was a humanitarian beside you," he charged. "Selling collar buttons certainly tightened you up. This is unparliamentary; but that duck needs a lesson; he's turned mean tricks on more than one of us who have obliged him. But what about the carbon—did you leave it with him? And is his signature on it O. K.?"

"It sure is!" grinned Richard. "He dented his John Hancock right through. I had him hypnotized, spieling; he never read the order. I filed it for him by proxy. And I know him; he'll never look at it again till the big moment arrives. He's one of those 'to-day' chaps; never wastes time checking up yesterday. And Stetson, the filing clerk, is dead from the head down, and the head booker—well, Flo, pays him twenty a week. I'm hep to that bunch—didn't I work there?"

"In that case," said Smith, "I'll make delivery quick this afternoon, so the Burbanked calendars can be on their merry way."

At the end of thirty days no check had arrived from Flo Beck. A reminder from Zingwall met with no response. It was the same at the end of sixty days. At the expiration of ninety days an especially curt reminder went out, and Flo mailed a check for one thousand dollars.

In due time Harry Smith handed the check to Mallory.

"It's no good," he said; "just as we expected. He's at his old tricks. Now do your little collecting job, and I suppose we might enter up your commission now."

Again Richard Mallory faced Flo Beck. Flo's smile extended to his eyes; Mallory's orbs were included in his cheerful grin.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Mallory?" asked Flo.

Dick exhibited a check, which Beck recognized at long range.

"You can shell out one thousand plunks," answered Mallory.

Beck swung to his desk.

"For why should I waste time with you?" he inquired. "I spend it with business men."

"You'll spend a little of it rakin' up one thousand iron men."

Flo swung back to face Dick. His smile had wholly faded.

"Beat it!" he bawled.

The Mallory smile had likewise departed. He leaned forward, tapping the Beck knee with a bony forefinger.

"Listen! You played me the rottenest trick, a year ago, that ever will be played on me, and don't you forget it. You got me away from Zingwall's on promises to whip your city sales force into shape, an' I did it, an' you sliced my salary in half to get me to leave, an' you put your stool-pigeon, that you'd had gettin' my stuff, in at the job at a beggar's wage. Didn't you?"

"Suppose I did!" sneered Beck. "What good does that do you now?"

"A whole lot! I'm with a real house now—Zingwall's—an' I'm hittin' back. You produce either the cash or the calendars, or we shut you up cold!"

"What's bitin' you?" snarled Beck. "What's—"

"Look!" Mallory held the original order in front of Flo's wrathful face. His finger indicated two all-persuasive words, included in the text in the upper part of the blank.

"*'On consignment!'*" quoted Mallory, with ghoulish glee. "On consignment! You know what that means, Beck, though it's a new one in calendars. You're just an agent; you're in the boots of an old boy pushing a specialty on the side; you're putting on the goods to go as they will; we're still the real owners. When we call on you, it's just the same as a grocer handling a new line of breakfast food the manufacturers shipped him on consignment; you've got to show. The cash or the calendars, Beck, right now, or the sheriff's lead button goes on your door!"

Beck snatched at the order, but Mallory coolly put it in his pocket.

"Look up your carbon," he mocked—"the carbon I had filed for you. Do you recollect that? You signed 'em both; here's the evidence!"

Flo did not bother to call for the carbon.

"Calendars?" he wailed. "I can't return your calendars! The men have been pushing 'October Eve'—most of 'em are sold, ordered; they're being imprinted now."

"Then they're your calendars. The cash, Beck, and in a hurry!"

"I haven't got it! I'm short. Give me a few days—"

"For why should I give you a chance? Did you give me any? No! Now, this minute, or we shut you up!"

A few minutes later Flo had rifled the safe and his own pockets. He was two hundred dollars shy. Dick refused to take a check for the balance. So Beck went out to borrow it while Mallory waited. With the vengeance of a two by four nature, Flo thrust as much of the money as he could manage at Mallory in small bills. Dick counted the haul, stuffed his pockets, and handed Flo a receipt in full, while Beck used horrible language.

"I'll get even!" he fulminated as Mallory turned to the door. "You shred-faced toothpick, you red-headed shark!"

Richard gave him a parting grin.

"Believe me, Flo," he acknowledged, "I heard Caruso carol once, but he was never in it for these sweet sounds. I could die waltzin'. You are a wizard, old head!"

Emerging upon the street, he walked for a block in gloating ecstasy. He came to with a pleasant shock. He had bumped into a girl, a mighty pretty girl.

In the selfsame instant they recognized each other and recoiled in delighted amaze. And because through all these weary months they had been unable to recall one another's names, their pleased exclamations of recognition found vent in one simultaneous word:

"You!"

Then Mallory's speech tumbled like many waters.

"Say, I've been thinking about you for a year! What became of you?"

"We moved—"

"Yes, I know that. But where? An' what you been doin'?"

"In the Bronx," replied the girl of the "L" and the Broadway restaurant and Central Park, smiling at him gloriously. "I'm in business now, in my stepfather's office—"

"Do you think a salesman is so worse? Could you marry one, do you think?" He had edged with her to the curb; his hand tightly clasped her own.

"Sa-a-y! Reduce speed!" she gasped, then dimpled, while her brown eyes shot mingled flattering regard and native shrewdness. "Maybe," she conceded, "if he made enough to keep me, an' if he'd stay home nights."

"It's settled!" he exploded. "I'll do everything! What do you know? To meet the one and only, lose her for a year, an' then run across her like this? Well, say, what's the use of wastin' time? What do you say to gettin' the license, and then beat it to the Little Church Around the Corner? You should worry about my keepin' you. Why, say, I put over a deal to-day; my clothes are lined with cush this minute—well, it's terrapin an' champagne to-night, if you say so. What do you say? Sub to the city hall?"

"I'll go you," she said. "And say, let's be good to each other!"

Later Mallory journeyed with her in a taxicab.

"Say," suggested the jubilant bridegroom, "what do you think about telling each other our real names? I ought to be getting acquainted with you. All I know now is that you used to be Miss Miriam Zeigler and you're now Mrs. Dick Mallory—"

"All right," she broke in. "What do you sell?"

"Calendars. Zingwall calendars. Best on earth—"

"Ain't that funny?" she laughed. "Why, I'm in the calendar business, too!"

"You *are*?" he exclaimed. "What house?"

"In my stepfather's office. You know I told you. He's Flo Beck. Do you know him?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Miriam looked with wonder into the face of a very recent husband, who looked like a startled pugilist just in receipt of an unexpected slipover.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

Mallory recovered, groggy but game.

"Do I know Flo Beck?" he echoed, with a wan smile. "Why, say, girly, if you knew what I think about him and what he thinks about me—well, I guess we wouldn't be here now!"

Then he told her all about it. She remained considering for a few moments.

"You sound like a best-seller," she told him reasonably. "Well, I'm glad we're here, if that makes you feel any better."

Her further speech was interrupted for a moment while he administered the bunny hug.

"The only thing to do now," she concluded, breathlessly escaping from his embrace, "is to go right down there and face him." And she called to the taxicab driver.

They marched into Flo Beck's office. At sight of Mallory, he plumped back in his chair, waving him wildly away.

"What you here again for?" he yelled. "For why do you butt in here again? I paid you once! Get out of here—"

"Say, Beck," grinned Mallory, "I've put it over you *twice* to-day. You know about the first deal. But you don't know about the second."

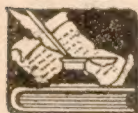
And he told him about it, while Beck gaped and gasped. Then they stood, silent and waiting.

Flo Beck's face rivaled in expression that of Mallory in the taxicab shortly before. It slowly broke into a comprehensive grin. And this time the smile included his eyes.

He put out his hand.

"You said when you sprung that calendar deal, bygones were bygones," he conceded. "You're compounding the interest. But, then, I got no kick comin'. I wanted Miriam to marry a business man, a regular shark. She has."

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



ADVENTURE is a subtle and elusive lady. One man may seek her persistently for years and in the far corners of the earth and encounter no more than the ordinary trials and mishaps of travel. To another she comes unasked and unwanted, slipping suddenly into the calm and quiet of his home and yanking him forth by the hair to take part in all sorts of wild and undreamed of—adventures. In fact, she doesn't even have to drag him forth—she can cut up quite a lot of unexpected capers right there in his front parlor, so to speak. No. You don't have to go to Central Africa or the Pole for her. Some of her very best stunts are pulled off right here in New York and its neighborhood, and if you don't believe it, all you have to do to be convinced is to read the new five-part serial beginning next week,

CHASE OF THE LINDA BELLE

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Fugitive Sleuth," "The Huntress," "The Fur-Bringers," etc.

You remember "The Fugitive Sleuth," doubtless. That in itself was pretty conclusive proof of the truth of our proposition, but this story clinches it. Not that it all happens in New York! On the contrary, very little of it does—in fact, very little of it happens on land at all—but it covers pretty thoroughly all the waters surrounding the city and most of the Sound as well, to say nothing of the Maine and Massachusetts and Maryland coasts, and takes you into places that many a born New Yorker has never even heard of.

Of course it isn't necessary to speak of the quality of the story—Hulbert Footner wrote it! 'Nough said. But from the moment you go aboard the trim yawl *Linda Belle*, with clever, plucky and pretty little *Ellen Ames* of Abbyport, Maine, and meet her first mate, *Lawrence Gourley*, and the "crew," *Freddy Cram* and, of course, the stewardess, *Venie*—well, if you like real blood-stirring adventure, *this is it*.



ABOUT the rarest literary bird there is is the humorist. The real simon-pure, *natural* humorist, that is, who can't help being funny if he tries. Mark Twain was one of these spontaneous humorists, and in William Slavens McNutt he has a very worthy successor, as all who have read his stories will agree. Mostly they have been short stories, but next week we have a special treat in store—a long novelette—

A FRONTIER OF MILK AND HONEY

BY WILLIAM SLAVENS MCNUTT

Author of "The Work and Its Worth," etc., etc.

We cannot tell you very much about the story here because—well, because the author does it

very much better than we possibly could; but if you will get aboard the train with that greatest of heroic actors, *J. Beverly Montaville*, and his brilliant supporting company, and especially his shrewd and wary angel, *Jim Seymour* ("He ain't no sucker, you can bet! You can't flim-flam him!"), and go with him tramping into the country of real, red-blooded, he-men, even unto *Valdoo* and *Katzenoo*, Alaska, you—well, you will have the very merriest trip of your life.



IT'S an old saying that "Old friends and old books wear well." The aim of this magazine has always been to give you the very best there is.

The answer is that next week's issue will contain one of the most unusual and striking short stories ever written. It is—

OLD ÆSON

BY SIR ARTHUR T. QUILLER-COUCH

A "Different" Story

The point is that it isn't a new offspring from the fertile pen of "Q," whose work has been known and welcomed on two continents for a score of years or more. Ye editor first read it a decade past at least, but has never forgotten it—will never forget it. It's a story you can read over and over again, and each time find new beauties in it. It's a story that lends itself with peculiar felicity to being read aloud to a circle of friends who haven't seen it. It's a story, in short, that you will welcome, if you *have* read it, with even more enthusiasm than that with which we offer it.

Oh yes, one word more. After you've finished "OLD ÆSON" you will inevitably be struck with the truly startling cleverness of the way it has been handled. For the solution, the dénouement, the explanation lies in the *very* l—

Wait! No human being, knowing what I was just going to blurt out, could resist ruining this little gem by an overplus of curiosity. So possess your soul with patience!

MARK April 27 down on your calendar in red ink. Do it now—and for two good reasons. First, because the baseball season will really be on, and second, because Samuel G. Camp is scheduled to come across with a new baseball yarn that's certain to knock a home run out of any fellow's laugh-container. "RUTHLESS DAY," Mr. Camp has called it, and when *Jimmy Riker*, second sackman for the Indians, starts his ruthless campaign, believe me, he makes Von Tirpitz look like the veriest of bush leaguers. Be on the lookout for it next week.

If you met him upon a country road, you would unquestionably classify him "tramp." And yet somewhere in the back of your mind would lurk a doubt as to whether you were right or not. Certain it is that the wanderlust was as much a part of him as the little mouth-harp with which he was accustomed to entertain his comrades among the doughboys. Then, suddenly, in the midst of one of these wild or comical songs and dances of his, he would be apt to break off, and body sagging, arms limp, he would move aimlessly away with a vacant look in his erstwhile animated eyes. Such is the interesting figure Barry Scobee makes "THE CRAW-FISHER," which will be published in next week's issue. When we meet "*Happy*," as the boys call him, he is serving his country down on the border. What happens to him is the story.

"SUCKERS," meditated *Smoke Engel*. "Just suckers! They're born every minute elsewhere, but Father Knickerbocker clocks his with a split-second watch." And so meditating he walked into *Steve Maloney's Hellas Café*—down in the neighborhood of Battery Park it is, if you don't happen to know—and proceeded to prove up as a real wise guy. It was a simple little deal he put through, too. Merely an ordinary, every-day business transaction, and how was he to know—But that is the story. "SUCKERS ALL," by Thomas McMorro; and if you read "*Smoke*," by the same author, in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for April 13, 1918, this second story of the foxy little cigar purveyor will be the first one you turn to next week.

"MASTER OF THE HOUR" A MASTERPIECE

TO THE EDITOR:

Have just finished reading "*The Planeteer*," which sure was fine, but of all the stories you have published in the last year the "*Master of the Hour*" was so much in the lead there was no comparison. In fact, I think it was the best thing you have published since "*Tarzan of the Apes*." Achmed Abdullah is sure some writer, but in the "*Master of the Hour*" he wrote a story which he will never equal again.

"*The Cosmic Courtship*" was one story which I could not go. I tried to read it every week, but could not stand it. As a rule I enjoy stories of its character, but some if it seemed too mixed-up or something; I don't know exactly myself. It seemed more like a dream after too much dinner! Well, I guess I had better quit, for I could praise all day, as I have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY a great many years.

Sussex, Wyoming.

REED MILLER.

LIKES BILL JENKINS

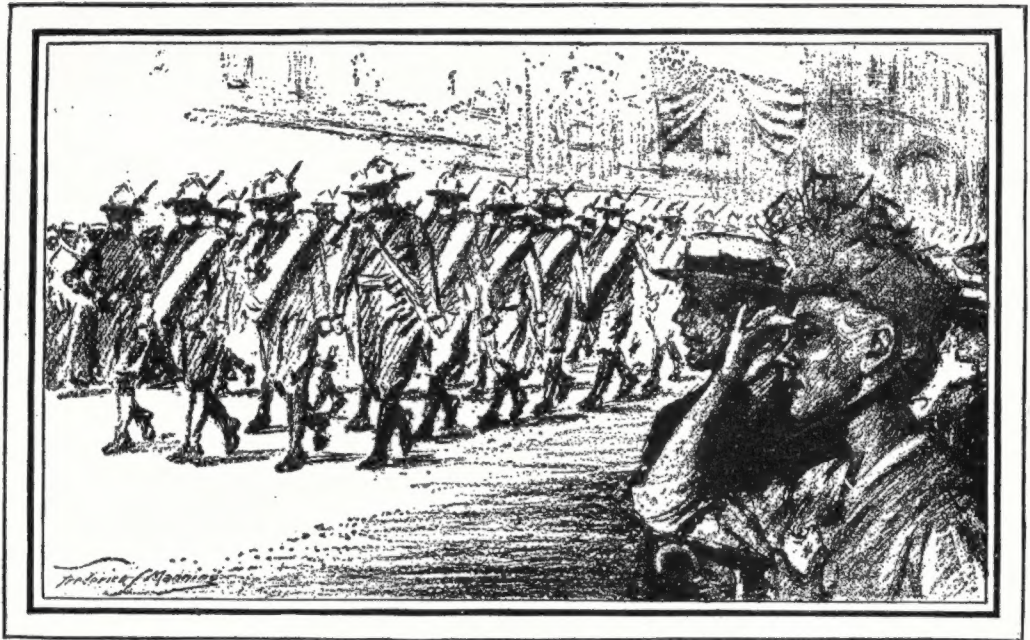
TO THE EDITOR:

My husband and I have been readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY now since 1910. We think it is the very best magazine there is. Our favorite authors are George Allan England, E. K. Means, Frank Condon, and lots of others. We get our ALL-STORY WEEKLY at the news-stand, and we missed the last numbers of "*Bill Jenkins, Buccaneer*," by George Allan England. The numbers, I think, are February 23 and March 2, 8, and 15, 1917.

Please find enclosed post-office money order for forty cents to pay for the four magazines. The last we read of *Bill* he was on a ship with *Sally*. But he was in a lot of trouble, so please send our magazines at once, as we are crazy to hear more about *Bill*. A well-wisher for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

MRS. F. E. BURKE.

Care of Owl Drug Store,
Goose Creek, Texas.



My Boy!

Will You Lend 25c to Uncle Sam to Help Save Her Boy's Life?

THE 69th New York was swinging along Fifth Avenue. The crowd at Forty-second Street and the Avenue was dense. Bands flared, flags flew, voices cheered.

Crouched in the doorway of a small shop trembled a little old woman. Every once in a while she would creep from the shelter of the doorway to peer through the ranks that lined the curb.

Suddenly she raised her arm and pointed somewhere into the passing files of Khaki.

"My boy!" she cried, smiling to the crowd.

Her little old face was aglow and a pride burned in her eyes.

Bending out over the curb, she followed with shaded eyes the company that was marching

down the street. For a long time she looked. Other companies passing were raising a hue and a cry from the sidewalks—but the little old woman was still gazing down the street . . .

* * * * *

"Mothers' sons—mothers' sons—

And still they passed with kits and guns—
Mothers' sons!"

Every one of us—man, woman and child—
can do something to help bring our boys back
in the glory of victory.

And one way to "do our bit" is to save our
quarters and buy W. S. S.

Is that too much to ask for the safety of our
mothers' sons?

25c Starts You

There are two kinds of War-Savings Stamps—25c Thrift Stamps and \$5 Stamps. The \$5 Stamps sell for \$4.14 during March, 1918, and for one cent additional each month thereafter during 1918. That is \$4.15 in April, \$4.16 in May, etc. The Government will pay you \$5 for each of these W. S. S. in January, 1923.

The 25c stamps sell at all times for 25c. When you buy your first 25c stamp at the post office or any bank or store, you will be given a Thrift Card, with spaces for sixteen 25c stamps (\$4 worth).

When the card is filled take it to the post office, or bank or any W. S. S. agency, and pay the few cents additional—you will receive a \$5 stamp which is described above.

If you are obliged to sell your \$5 stamp before January, 1923, the Government will buy it back from you at more than you paid for it. War-Savings Stamps are as safe as the U. S.



NATIONAL WAR-SAVINGS COMMITTEE: WASHINGTON
FOR THE WINNING OF THE WAR

Space contributed by the Publisher through the Division of Advertising U. S. Committee on Public Information



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Only \$2⁵⁰ a Month

The superb 21-Jewel Burlington watch, with all these exceptional features, sold direct to you at the rate of only \$2.50 per month. Positively the exact price the wholesale dealer would have to pay us. Think of it: Only \$2.50 per month for this high-grade guaranteed watch *direct* at a remarkable price. Don't delay—act now.

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